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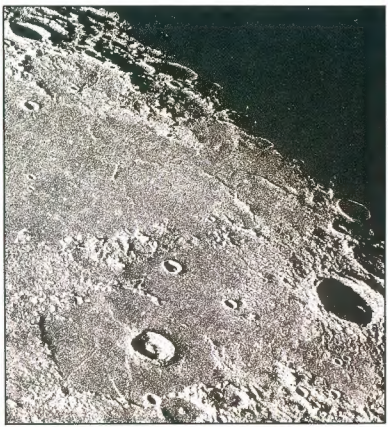
CEREBUS

mothers & daughters

36

M A T E



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SEP

NOTE • FROM • THE PRESIDENT

As you can see from the back cover, the long postponed CEREBUS WORLD TOUR will become a reality next year. I hope I'll be able to cover most of the relevant information in this space, although I'm sure that a great deal of the TOUR will evolve in the coming months, making it necessary to preempt my on-going discussions of self-publishing from time to time.

****

Because of the success of Dan Vado's Alternative Press Expo and the Small Press Expo in Bethesda, Maryland this summer, I'll be using those two events as a template for the 1995 WORLD TOUR (or at least the North American 'leg'). Basically, I'm planning tour stops in every area of the United States where there is a 'high profile' self-publisher. Gerhard and I will be paying our own plane fare and hotel accommodations, as well as renting space at a hotel (a room the size of an average one day con — or slightly smaller of slightly larger). We'll be charging a small entrance fee (four dollars or so) and providing table space for self-publishers and mini-comics publishers. It will be up to the individual creators as to whether they want to sell their own material at their table or if they want to sell books to sponsoring retailers who will be setting up tables selling exclusively small press, self-published and mini-comics. The only person I've really talked with about this extensively is Martin Wagner, who will be picking the locations and such for Austin, Texas. Austin will be set up around Martin, Shannon Wheeler (*Too Much Coffee Man*), Terry Moore (*Strangers in Paradise*) and, of course, Ger and myself. We'll be displaying artwork, doing head sketches and autographs and what-not. At night (just as we did in Baltimore at the Diamond Seminar), we'll be hanging out in a local bar and doing jam sketches for anyone who wants to bring along a sketch book. This is definitely a KISS program (Keep it Simple, Stupid). The idea is to get local exposure for self-publishing and mini-comics. Creators who are published by companies are welcome to get a table as well to display and sell their own work (i.e. we're not looking for company participation, so we would not make tables available for, say, Fantagraphics, but if Roberta Gregory wants to show up and promote *Naughty Bits*, she's more than welcome. Either the creator can sell books provided by the company or the company can sell the books to a sponsoring retailer). The CEREBUS WORLD TOUR will be confined to our table (or tables) as the case may be. I would encourage anyone who wants to try it out to set up their own tour and to make the various stops part of their own program.

Basically, at least for the next two years, *Cerebus* is not going to be a part of the traditional convention/store signing environment. I have absolutely no complaints about my treatment at conventions and store signings, but as Evan Dorkin put it so eloquently in a recent letter to the Buyer's Guide, the conditions for the 'little guys' in Artists' Alley are getting worse and worse. There have even been outright bans on selling comic books and artwork at the artists' tables which makes going to a convention (ANY convention) economically unfeasible. It would be very easy for me to use my 'box office clout' to enjoy the preferred treatment I get at cons and adopt a 'let them eat cake' attitude about the mini-comics guys and self-publishers in Artists' Alley. Mindful of the 'boom and bust' of the late eighties, I think it's time to build our own environment before we get ploughed under again. Having seen Evan Dorkin's table mobbed at the Small Press Expo in Bethesda and having seen him completely over-looked at a Big California Con ('excuse me, can you tell me where Rob Liefield's signing?'), I think the writing is on the wall in Big Red Letters. It's time for us to get out of here. I'm not going away mad, and I'm not going away sad, but I am going away.

In the spirit of Keep it Simple, Stupid, I'm trying to limit the active participation in organizing the tour stops to Ger and I and the local self-publishers. I have a lot of close friends in the retail and distribution communities and it is very tempting to spend a dozen hours a week on the phone gathering Other People's Money into a big pile to do a self-publishing Lollapalooza Tour, but I can already see the kind of 'horse-trading' that would lead to — store signings, endorsements, too many lunches, dinners, etc. etc. So what kind of participation am I looking for? Basically, the Tour t-shirt will be offered for sale through Graphitti Designs. Stores can either deal directly with Bob Chapman or buy the shirts from their distributor. I'd also like to do a jam print with the local self-publisher to hand out at the events. All of the jam prints will be assembled into a Tour Book which will be solicited through the distributors to help defray some of the costs of the hotel space, plane fares, etc. etc. and will be provided to the local retailers who are going to help with the event. What constitutes 'help'? Setting up a table to sell self-published and small press books at the show, promoting the show in your store. I really want to avoid the 'mini tour' store signing thing, as well as 'in-store' parties. I think self-publishing, mini-comics events are going to work better on the A.P.E. and Small Press Expo models. Neutral ground. The creators aren't in their studios and the retailers aren't in their stores. For two years, I am looking forward to being in a comic book environment that has no Penthouse trading cards, Spider-man stand-up figures, war gaming stuff, and the super-hero du jour grimacing at me while I sign Cerebus trades. No panels or

Continued on Inside Back Cover

CEREBUS

NO. 186 SEPTEMBER 1994

DAVE SIM
President

GERHARD
Vice-President

LINDA BERZINS
Typesetting

MOTHERS & DAUGHTERS
a novel

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BOOK ONE
(Cerebus 151 to Cerebus 162)
Flight

•

BOOK TWO
(Cerebus 163 to Cerebus 174)
Women

•

BOOK THREE
(Cerebus 175 to Cerebus 186)
Reads

•

BOOK FOUR
(Cerebus 187 to Cerebus 200)

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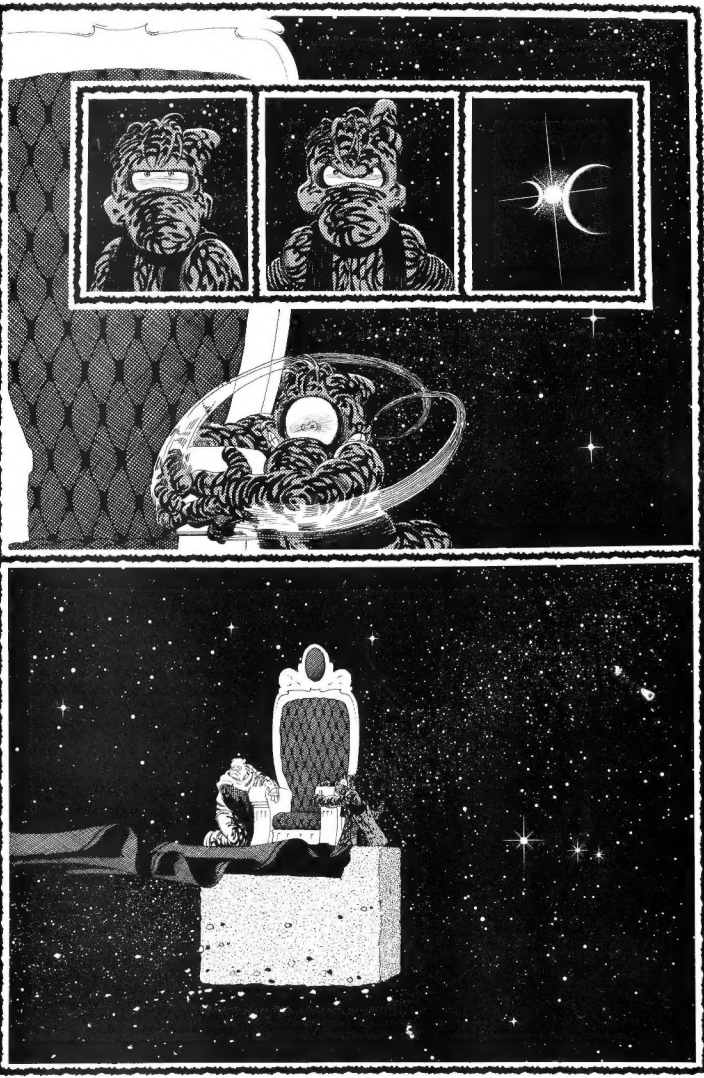
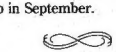


Viktor Davis stared out the window of the second-floor office at a grim and grey June weekend. The opulently furnished hotel lobby where he had left the reader was gone. Reality had replaced fabrication. The reader was now back in the reader's customary place, two, almost three months distant from the author. It looked more like September than June out there, he thought. There was

a strange satisfaction in that. Issue 186 would ship in September.



The Female Void and the Male Light.

Viktor Davis sat contemplating the inch-high stack before him: typewritten pages extensively annotated, yellow-lined note-paper, assorted photocopies of magazine articles and newspaper clippings. The elaborate notes rambled for a few paragraphs or several pages, invariably stopping in mid-thought, mid-sentence.

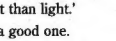
The Female Void and the Male Light.

He riffled through the unkempt pile of paper, pausing occasionally to read some fragment or other: 'real'-world examples of the Female Void and the Male Light. Religion, politics, the academic world, entertainment.

'More heat than light.'

That was a good one.

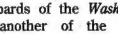
'More Female Void than Male Light', 'More Emotion than Reason'. It was a perfect snapshot of the modern Female Void Age. Emotion was pre-eminent, ruling virtually without opposition in the Life Out of Balance world of the last decade of the twentieth century, infecting all aspects of human existence. *All You Need is Love.* 'Yeah?' snarled Keith Richards. 'Try payin' the fuckin' rent with it.' Viktor Davis smiled to himself.



Another fragment. JFK in the final year of his life, being driven to some event or other. With him in the car is Toni Bradlee (wife of Jason Robards of the *Washington Post*) or perhaps another of the interchangeable Washington Wives.

'Mr. President,' she asks him pointblank, 'have you ever been in love?'

'No,' he answers matter-of-factly, adding with a sudden flash of his characteristic grin, 'came close a couple of times, though.'



Journalism had been an early casualty in the war between the Female Void and the Male Light. 'How do you *feel*?' had virtually replaced 'who, what, where, when and why' as the journalistic cornerstone. 'What are you *feeling right now*?' Every once in a great while, the Female Void would run afoul of some military figure or a police captain or a fire marshal: some male who had not been devoured whole, who still had something of himself left to call his own. His answer would begin, 'I think . . .' or 'I believe . . .' and he would proceed to enunciate a belief, a principle, an ideal which was, to him, fundamental. The Female or Male Feminist (they differ only cosmetically from each other) interviewing him would be dogged in his or her pursuit: 'But how do you *feel* as an individual, as a person, as a human being?' The interview subject would invariably look confused, discomfited at this. After all, he had just *answered* the question. He would paraphrase his belief, his principle, his ideal. 'I think . . .' 'I believe . . .' At this point the he/she interviewer switched, invariably, to another satellite feed: to another journalist or a psychologist or a social worker. Reasoning, Thinking Males with Systems of Belief, made for very bad television.

I watched an interview the other night on *CBC Prime Time* with a nineteen-year-old girl from an old-fashioned (which is to say 'principled') Vietnamese family. She had gotten pregnant during her last year of high school. She knew that she had brought 'shame' to her father, to her family. 'But this is a free country, isn't it?' she asks the camera. 'That means you can do whatever you want, doesn't it?' The camera was indulgently mute on the subject. The girl moved on. She *felt* scared that she was going to be a mother. She *felt* unhappy that she had been disowned by her father, but she also, you know, *felt* happy when her mother called to tell her that she would answer any questions that she had about pregnancy. She *felt* most enthusiastically about her school guidance counsellor because he had, you know, just listened to her 'spill her guts' and hadn't tried to, you know, make her *feel* bad. At no time, needless to say, did the word 'think' cross her lips. There is, of course, no need for her to think. The taxpayers of Canada will pay for all of her baby's needs. She didn't need to be made to *feel* bad. All that she needed was someone to direct her

to the appropriate agency. The rest of it was just paperwork. It's a free country, isn't it?

That means you can do whatever you want.

Doesn't it?

Unbidden, the image of the Cerebus Theatre swam to the surface of Viktor Davis' awareness. He turned away from his typewriter and allowed the picture to coalesce in his mind's eye.

The *Cerebus* readership was there, composed in some (small? large?) measure of females with their male housepets. He squinted, endeavouring to see if any male was chafing at the invisible conduits and metaphorical tubing which drained his life, his essence, his energy as surely and as effectively as any fictional vampire. Cats' eyes gleamed in the darkness, filled with malice. A couple of rows back an obese brunette was stripping away chunks of brain tissue from a thin, pale youth with a spotted face. His head lolled against his shoulder in her direction, his face radiant with ecstasy. He turned to her, his eyes half-lidded. He smiled and mouthed, 'I love you.' She smiled back at him, indulgently. His eyes closed once more. She stuck out her sandpaper tongue, dotted with brains and blood, in Viktor Davis' direction and then cackled loudly. The youth giggled quietly to himself.

To the far left, in the front row, the white husk of a heavy-set man in his early thirties squirmed in the direction of his Lady and Master, his features reflecting pain, confusion and fear. She held his forearm in front of her as if they were bound, one to the other, but in such a way that she was also holding him slightly apart from her. Viktor Davis could see that the fellow had been a quick meal — little more than a snack, by the looks of things. Traces of dried brain-matter, hard and uninviting, encrusted what little there was left of the top of his head. She looked very, very hungry. Every few seconds she turned around in her seat, the hunger in her gaze sweeping across the rows to her immediate rear. Females touched by that insatiable stare hunched a little closer to their own housepets, a menacing growl rumbling low in their throats.

Viktor Davis turned back to his typewriter.

'There is no cure for willful stupidity,' he typed and then sat back, cigarette in hand, to contemplate the words.

He thought of the scene in *Cisco Pike* where a character played by Harry Dean Stanton worries aloud to the title character (played by Kris Kristofferson) that he doesn't think he will be able to 'get it up' with one of the two women they have picked up for the evening. 'Man,' says Kristofferson, 'it's not your body they're after, it's your goddamn soul.' Stanton blinks several times and a look of relief crosses his features. 'Thanks, man' he says.

There is no cure for willful stupidity.

Yes, said Viktor Davis, I am being brutal here.

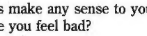
In contemplating the full weight of popular culture, television, movies, magazines and newspapers, I see the completely unopposed advocacy of Merged Permanence and I think that a definite brutality is called for. The Male Light is jeopardized on all fronts, in my view. The Devouring Rapacious Female Void is not a thing to be taken lightly, to be explained away, to be rationalised into neutrality. I'm not here to make you feel good. I am here to make you think. And to make you think, I have to make you see.

Emotion, whatever the Female Void would have you believe, is not a more Exalted State than is Thought. In point of fact, I think Emotion is animalistic, serpent-brain stuff. Animals do not Think, but I am reasonably certain that they have Emotions. 'Eating this makes me Happy.' 'When my fur is all wet and I am cold, it makes me Sad.' 'Ooo! Puppies!' 'It makes me Excited to Chase the Ball!' Reason, as any husband can tell you, doesn't stand a chance in an argument with Emotion. There are no rules to Emotional Argument. You simply wander around in rhetorical circles until you feel Happy again, and then the argument is over. This was the fundamental reason, I believe, that women were (rightly) denied the vote for so long. In order to move a civilisation forward, an overview is required. You have to be able to step back and examine the structure of a problem. This is what Thinking, Reasoning, is. Every political campaign waged in the G-7 countries has as its centerpiece Job Creation. Polls give the politicians a list of voter concerns. Job Creation is at the top of the list. Ergo, the politicians promise Jobs. Because the Female Void dominates the proceedings (simply because the Female Void dominates everything), a candidate is elected based on how he or she makes the electorate Feel. We Feel we can Trust this candidate. No effort is made to step back and ask, 'Isn't the whole *point* of technology to *eliminate* work?' Reason would tell you

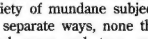
that you can either eliminate (or limit) technology or you can eliminate (or limit) jobs. It is not possible to have it both ways. The Female Void Emotional response is that we *have* to have it both ways. And so we do. And so the problem gets worse instead of better.

I think of Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, the Continental Congress, Illuminated Thinking, the Finest Hour of the Male Light, dealing with the specific problem of Independence. What did they want to do? What did they *not* want to do? What innovations had past cultures brought to bear on limiting the ability of government to interfere in the lives of its citizens? Where had other cultures gone wrong and what could be done to prevent and correct those mistakes? They did brilliant work. *Brilliant* work. I am reasonably certain that such Male Light yet exists in our day and age, and I am equally certain that it avoids the political arena like the plague. In our Female Void Age it is the sole job of elected officials to make the electorate feel good about them frequently enough to get re-elected. Re-election is largely a matter of provoking a positive emotional response within a narrow time frame through televised portrayal, the raising of sufficient funds to make that televised portrayal ubiquitous, and (apart from that) having the good fortune to have no deviations from the Female Void Emotional Perception of Merit (drugs, boozing, women on the side) come to light at an inopportune moment. We do not elect leaders. We elect televised portrayals of Husbands and Fathers. Women (because of the double standard of Female Void Emotional Perception) are elected as televised portrayals of Good Career Women. If she looks like she would be a Good Boss, it is not necessary that she be a Wife and/or Mother. Thinking, the ability to Reason through a problem and put a solution into effect, is very low on the list of priorities, if it is on the list at all. Legislative Assemblies are filled, throughout the civilised world, with televised portrayals capable of provoking an emotional response in their respective constituents. We have been treading water for some time and show no indication of endeavouring to swim any time in the foreseeable future. Political positions are judged on the Emotional Basis of whether they are Popular or Unpopular. Popular is good. Unpopular is bad. Most political positions based on Reason are Unpopular. Most political positions based on Emotion are Popular — provided the Emotion provoked is happiness; if the Emotion provoked is unhappiness or anxiety or uneasiness, then that political position is Unpopular and therefore bad.

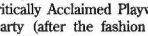
Does this make any sense to you? Or does it just make you feel bad?



Male Light does not Merge. Thinking, Reason, is best served by solitude, isolation. Intellect 'works through' problems, changing impediment into insight, oversight into overview, stalemate into solution. A 'Big Picture' emerges at the 'end of the day', but the day itself is long, composed exclusively of examination and re-examination. History is filled with examples of Great Minds being brought together by the Merged Void's emotional and idiosyncratic belief (or, rather, *feeling*) that 'two heads are better than one'. On occasion, they are able to 'strike sparks' off one another or they manage to trigger mutual or complementary insights in their respective fields of endeavour through interaction. It is far more likely that they will pass a pleasant hour or two exchanging small talk on a variety of mundane subjects and then go their separate ways, none the worse for intellectual wear and tear, much to the collective disappointment of the Assembled Voids who are without a glimmer of understanding of intellectual processes and who assume that the Male Light is the same as the Merged Void, 'only different'. More than one Society Hostess having brought together (say) a Nobel Prize-Winning Author and a Critically Acclaimed Playwright at her dinner party (after the fashion of breeding one thoroughbred horse to another) has been disillusioned to find, upon her return, no shining literary offspring in evidence, their conversation dominated instead by the Yankees' chance of holding first place in the American League East.



Light does not Breed. Only Jackie Onassis (and like-minded Voids) could perceive her Arrow Shirt Ad Son as having anything in common with his late father, apart from a weakness for blonde actresses.

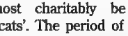


'Two heads are better than one' has much in common with 'two can live as cheaply as one'. It represents, at its core, the Merged Void raking the Male Light with its Emotion-based fingernails. There is little empirical evidence to support either statement. As the Emotional Female Void devours what is left

of the civilisation which has been built by the Rational Male Light, it has extrapolated the former maxim into Larger and More Efficient Voids ('If two heads are better than one, think how good a dozen heads will be!'). Study Groups, Steering Committees, Regional Advisory Boards, Crown Commissions, etcetera, etcetera, ad nauseam. While it is a basic truth that Light does not Merge, that Light does not Breed, Voids do nothing else. The Merged Void represents Consensus. It is a purely Emotion-based belief (or, rather, *feeling*) that through Consensus, one arrives at 'Truth' (or, rather, Truth).

In a recent interview, Eddie Campbell, a Considerable Male Light in this Age of the Female Void, discussed his experience as a brief (and much-amused) participant in the creativity-by-committee of Comics' Greatest World (hyperbolic nomenclature being a hallmark of the Merged Void). He observed that the family cat in the Campbell household had been named by committee and that it had taken a full quorum of family members the better part of several hours to arrive at 'Puss'. If one looks closely at the work that is done by the Merged Voids which are devouring our culture, much of it could most charitably be described as 'naming cats'. The period of time it takes to arrive at 'Puss' is directly proportional to the number of 'heads which are better than one' assigned to the task.

As a parenthetical aside, several meetings were held at Dark Horse to determine whether or not there would be an apostrophe in Comics' Greatest World.



What motivates this behaviour? What informs the sensibilities of those who sit tapping pencil against pad, looking thoughtful, portraying themselves as the Good and Dutiful Committee Member? What keeps them from standing up and raising the point of order (Mr. Chairperson) that if brains were dynamite, there wouldn't be enough in this room to blow up a paper bag?

Patriarchy? The imposition of Male Power which restrains and endlessly postpones the Dawning of the Glorious Female Golden Age?

I beg to differ.

Behind this Lesser Void of White Collar Make-Work Programs, the stultifying sameness of ass-covering and ass-kissing, the endless postponement of decision-making in favour of 'further study', 'further discussion', lies the Greater Void, the Omnivorous Engine which drives every committee, every study group, every institutionalised waste of human time and energy, which drives, in point of fact, our entire degraded society.

The Wife and Kids.

If we're going to be able to afford that new dining-room set, I'm going to have to get that raise. If I'm going to be able to get enough money for the down payment on the house, I'm going to have to pull a lot of overtime. If I'm going to pay for the new living-room furniture and the ballet lessons and the tuition at the private school, I'm going to have to get that promotion.

In one of those Poor Us studies for which the Emotional Female Void is notorious, it was pointed out that after a divorce, the average male standard of living rises by (pick your own ungodly number) percent. The average female standard of living drops by (pick your own ungoddessly Poor Us number) percent. This was presented (of course) as living proof of the unfairness of the Global Economic Structure. I think the more rational explanation is that the excision of a five-to-six-foot leech from the surface of a human body means that that body is going to have more of its own blood in its own veins. Unless the leech finds another body, it is going to go hungry. (*Please don't call us leeches,* huffed the leeches, *we prefer the term 'asset-challenged'.*)

Corporations, a living example of the Merged Void if ever there was one, always show a preference for the Family Man when it comes to promotions and positions of responsibility. In the case of Merged Voids, as with most other permutations of existence, It Takes One to Know One. Corporations (or companies of any size, really) wink knowingly at the Little Woman and Her Brood. Once the Male Light has disappeared over the Event Horizon, once the manacle of gold has been pounded into place on the ring finger of his left hand, he is, indeed, a Wage Slave. What goes unsaid (or, rather, what has gone unsaid until now) is that he serves Two Mistresses, Twin Voids. As he labours to make his mortgage payments, pay for groceries, little Axelrod's College Fund, the new sofa, the new drapes, the bigger house, the Company can rest easy. In labouring to fill the insatiable Void Need for material possessions at home, his time and his energy and his spirit disappear into the Vaginal Bottom Line of the workplace. Divorce, once badly thought of, has yielded even greater benefits. The

employee with a Wife and Mistress, and later a Wife and an Ex-Wife (and still later a Wife, an Ex-Wife and a Mistress) is very much rocking to the beat of the Merged Void. Assuming he's going to get a little ahead of himself, the Bank Void steps in with an easy-payment schedule.

Ah, success.

Viktor Davis smiled to himself.

He had been fascinated by power all of his life, and in the Wife and Kids he had found its greatest manifestation in human society. He turned and regarded his readership once more.

A bright-eyed fellow in a dark-blue suit — his shirt lightly starched, his red-and-black-striped tie neatly pressed — locked eyes with Viktor Davis. He smiled and in his smile there was great pity. Over his shoulder there was visible a slim, young woman with green eyes. She lapped delicately at the open wound within the desiccated remains of his temple. 'I understand what you're talking about,' he said. 'We know this couple, see? Man, they are just the absolute picture of what you just described. What you don't realise is that there *are* good women in the world. You just haven't found the right one, yet. That's all.'

Viktor Davis took a drag from his cigarette and expelled a series of small smoke rings. The bright-eyed fellow and Viktor Davis stared into each other's eyes for a period of several seconds. One corner of the bright-eyed fellow's smile twitched slightly and the merest trace of anxiety crossed his features. The slim, young woman took a deep bite from the wound. He closed his eyes and the smile broadened. 'You'll see,' he said, leaning towards her. 'You'll see.'

Viktor Davis turned back to his typewriter and his pile of notes, which he began thumbing through absent-mindedly. One of the scrawled observations on a torn piece of yellow-lined notepaper caught his eye. *The Male Light and the Female Void: Seminal Energy and Omnivorous Parasite. As ancient as the sacrifice of a Corn King. As ubiquitous as a hundred generations of Roman Catholics eating the flesh and drinking the blood of a Great Prophet.*

Paper-clipped to that one:

What was the essence of Jesus' philosophy but the reformation of Judaism as constituted in his time? 'You consume an elephant and excrete a gnat,' he scolded. In regarding the centuries-long work that Merged Voids had committed upon the Word of God, layers of interpretation on layers of interpretation on layers of interpretation, the Word itself so obscured that little remained but the Profession of Interpretation itself, he had attempted to inject a note of sanity into the proceedings. 'You know, if you just say *do unto others as you would have them do unto you*, you could probably knock a good four hundred pages out of the rule book right there.' What he failed to recognise was that the Letter of the Law is the province of the Merged Void. It is only the Male Light that is concerned with its Spirit.

Too sensible.

Too much Light.

Bang Bang Bang

Not surprisingly, it was a European who first broached the subject of the Woman Who Would Come Between Gerhard and Viktor Davis. The occasion was the 1993 Wondercon. Apropos nothing, Jean-Marc Lofficier had launched into an eloquent soliloquy on the subject. No, that wasn't quite accurate. They had been discussing Getting to Issue Three Hundred, and Europeans, having had a longer and more insightful association with the Unfairer Sex, knew that Getting Hit By a Bus (the North American impediment of choice) ranked a distant second, both in terms of likelihood and severity of consequence. At one point, Lofficier had used one of his employers, Moebius, as an example (Viktor Davis had forgotten the entirety of it, but evidently friend Moebius was caught between the Rock of his Present Void, the Hard Place of his Past Void, and His Little Yum-Yum On The Side, or some such thing). Lofficier was surprised to find that Viktor Davis had given the matter a great deal of consideration, that (uncharacteristically for a North American) he recognized it as a primary and central danger. Viktor Davis explained that he had chosen the course of Sequential Temporary Voids: he had no problem with an infrequently offered candidate sitting on his knee for a while, but The Big Chair to Viktor Davis' Left Stayed Empty.

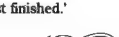
Jean-Marc wished Viktor Davis luck, but

expressed his sincere conviction that such restraint was not possible in the long term. How very French, thought Viktor Davis. At that moment, Viktor Davis' Then-Current, Now Ex-Temporary Void (probably the best-known secret at that year's Wondercon, apart from Neil Gaiman and *his* Temporary Supplementary Void) sidled up.

'So, what are you boys talking about?'

Viktor Davis smiled.

'We've just finished.'

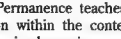


I am alone, said Viktor Davis. I am not lonely. There is a big difference.

I have not had a Merged Permanence in my life for five years. It took at least three of those five years for my brain to start functioning properly again. In the aftermath of being part of a Merged Void, all that is left for some time is Void Residue: Emptiness, Fear and Emotional Hunger. It is these three and the endless, fruitless search for a Permanent Cure that the Emotional Female Void calls Love. If you merge with that sensibility, you will share in its sickness. No matter what you pour into it, it remains empty; no matter how you reassure it, it remains afraid; no matter how much of yourself you permit it to devour, it remains hungry. If you look at her and see anything besides emptiness, fear and emotional hunger, you are looking at the parts of yourself which have been consumed to that point.

The ability to be alone, to have isolation as your primary state of existence, will serve you in good stead in any situation in which you find yourself. The ability to live in Merged Permanence teaches you only how to function within the context of Another's neuroses, inadequacies and failings. It teaches you how to use your own neuroses, inadequacies and failings as both cudgel and petition. When the Merged Permanence ends, whether next week, next year, five years from now, ten years from now, you are left with completely useless life skills, emptiness, fear and emotional hunger.

Fuck dancing. Let's talk about Art.



Years ago Jules Feiffer and I were talking about Norman, and someone asked, 'How come these Jews get married so often?' Jules replied, 'Because they can afford it.' And he was exactly right. Saul Bellow with his greater conservativeness would never have been able to marry four times if he hadn't had the money and I wouldn't have married three times if I, to my surprise, hadn't been able to afford it either.

Alfred Kazin
Peter Manso's *Mailer: His Life and Times*

According to Town & Country *magazine, raising a child to age 18 costs $679,000 U.S.*

news item

While, for Viktor Davis, it was a source of great amusement to watch Captains of Industry, Pillars of the Community, the Suit-and-Tie Brigade devoured by the Emotional Female Void, their resources, lives and energy disappearing over the Event Horizon of Merged Permanence, the Joke, to put it mildly, lost something of its flavour when it came to Artists. Would that he could conjure a podium, a venue, and assemble all the creative Male Light in one place.

Women, he would say, are not Muses. Muses are Muses. To confuse one with the other is to mistake the Devouring Void for the Seminal Light. Earthly Women and the Muses are ancient, sworn enemies. The battlefield is the Creative Male. On the one side is the encampment of Discordia, of Diana, of Venus located in his Heart and in his Groin. On the other is the Bastion of Calliope, Clio, Erato, Euterpe, Melpomene, Polyhymnia, Terpsichore, Thalia and Urania, in his Brain and in his Mind. The Muses are tolerant and understanding of border raids, skirmishes, and harassing maneuvers. Throughout the history of the Male Light, there have been few painters, few writers, who have not had a She Who Must Be Accommodated. For some it was their mothers. For many their wives, their mistresses, their girlfriends. For many it was their daughters, a favourite waitress, a stripper, a whore. To the Muses, they are all one. Mother, whore, wife, daughter, stripper, waitress, mistress, girlfriend.

Women inspire men to do great works
And then distract us from carrying them out.

Oscar Wilde

It is up to each individual Male in whom the creative fire burns, in the words of Pater, 'as a hard, gem-like flame' to decide whether to maintain that radiance, whether to settle for a wavery, uncertain light, or whether to extinguish it altogether. The individual Male decides for himself which side in the ancient battle is the better armed, who gets the best reinforcements, the most effective weapons, whose barricades are solid and well-fortified,

and whose are makeshift and ramshackle. John Lennon maintained through his House-Husband years of baking bread and minding the baby that he had 'lost his Muse'. Untruer words were never spoken. He drove his Muse from him. The forces within his Groin and his Heart, armed to the teeth, legion upon legion upon legion, surrounded those forces in his Brain and in his Mind, and the battle was lost. John Lennon was a triumph for the malignant forces of Discordia, of Diana, of Venus.

Viktor Davis did not, for the most part, consider actors to be Artists (or even artists). There was more of the Void than the Light about them. How many decent movie scripts had been twisted and transmogrified at the whim of a 'bankable name'? Actors were a great part of the problem in this regard. Movies were no longer stories, they were 'vehicles', voracious Black Holes of degraded currency, tailored to the perceived requirements of the non-creative. He stared at the four quotes, extracted carefully from the murky Emotional Female Void which was the essence, the sum and the substance of *Vanity Fair* magazine. Fuck it, he thought. It's not as if it's Keanu Reeves or Kevin Costner or some shit; it's Jack Nicholson:

> *My type of man is not attracted to society at this moment. The fun is gone. There is a quiet desperation in it all. I've been a very social person all my life. So, if I'm backed off, if all my type is backed off, then the fun quotient, in my opinion, is going to drop.*
>
> *You only lie to two people in your life: your girlfriend and the police. Everybody else you tell the truth to.*
>
> *Today, you've got endless women in their 20's and 30's who don't know if they want to be a mother, have lunch, or be secretary of state.*
>
> *This is so far below where I had hoped the battle would be pitched that I'm not interested.*

There is a wonderful story about Pablo Picasso at work in his studio on a mural of some kind. Both his wife and his mistress ended up in the studio and (naturally enough) an argument began. The argument became more and more heated and finally erupted into an all-out hair-pulling, claws-and-teeth cat fight. Picasso never once turned around. He just kept working.

I love that story.

Alan Moore decided some months ago that, rather than have some sort of tedious mid-life crisis, he would endeavour to become a Magician, a Shaman. Alan Moore, needless to say, is very good at everything he attempts. He is a very strong-willed person, very insightful, very balanced, very stable. As these are not, by any stretch of anyone's imagination, common traits in the Age of the Female Emotional Void Triumphant, I will forgo even the most cursory recitation of the Means by which he set about accomplishing his task. Take it or leave it; in the Viktor Davis scheme of things, the possible repercussions of a member of his readership ignoring a Kids, Don't Try This At Home disclaimer supersedes the author's interest in satisfying your curiosity.

Leaving aside the Means, the End (or one of them anyway) was a visit to the Big White Room. They were all there, Alan informs me. Hawksmoor, Crowley, Vitruvius, Thomas Hobbes, this one and that one. All the Mages of the Ages. 'They are just who they say they are,' Alan observed. 'The Illuminati. Not Jewish Bankers and Worldwide Conspirators. The Illuminated Ones.' I asked if Alan just, you know, *saw* them or if he had any kind of exchange with them.

'You know, Viktor, I looked around and I noticed there weren't any women in the room. And I said to' (I forget which one he said it was: doesn't matter), 'There are no women. Is this some kind of faggy boys' club or something, then?'

This, according to Alan, generated a good deal of amusement. I laughed as well (which put him off a bit). He offered his opinion that there was probably a Women's Room somewhere else.

I don't think so, Alan.

I don't *think* so.

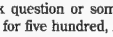
Viktor Davis reread the previous segment.

That just about sums it up, he thought. The Void and Artists. He reminded himself that he was endeavouring merely to *make* his points and he sincerely wanted to avoid belabouring them. He smiled to himself.

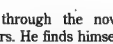
Fuck Art.

Let's dance some more.

The difference, of course, is one of perception. Which is more important (as an example): Sex or Emotion? The Sixties were a Male Decade. Sex was everywhere. Emotion took a back seat. In my own case, if I could have a different woman every night of the week, I would do so. If I could have every woman I desired, but I could only have her once, I would do so. If the bargain required that I would never know the Joy of Merged Permanence, there would be no contest. You might as well ask me if I would rather have a nice cream pie or bamboo shoots stuck under my fingernails. What is this, a trick question or something? I'll take cream pies for five hundred, Alex.



In my view, it comes down to which you think is Paper Currency and which you think is Gold. To women, to the Emotional Female Void, their emotions, their feelings, are the Gold at the center of their economic system. Sex is the Paper Currency which represents one aspect of those emotions. To me Sex is the Gold, female emotions the valueless bits of paper interposed between myself and the treasure. As the Emotional Female Void has become pre-eminent in our age, men have been offered two choices: either perceive Emotion as Gold or do without the Paper Currency. Of course, for men, the proposition becomes: 'Either acknowledge that Paper Currency is more valuable than Gold, or do without the Gold.' The majority of men have capitulated happily. Yes, yes, Paper Currency is more valuable. Can I have some Gold now? The answer, of course, is no. Why do you want Paper Currency (Gold) when I'm offering you all of this Gold (Paper Currency)? Women in the context of Merged Permanence develop a profound jealousy of their own bodies. For most men, the great myth of Merged Permanence is that you will 'get it whenever you want it'. Over a period of time, this becomes adjusted to 'getting it regularly'. Inevitably, this declines into 'getting it on the rare occasions when she'll let me have some'. There have been many historical precedents for women withdrawing sexual favours in order to assert their Power. Today, it is a worldwide, firmly entrenched phenomenon. 'Women Who Refuse to Have Sex With Their Husbands' is not a topic that you are going to see documented in the Void-dominated media; it certainly is not going to be the subject of a week-long series on *Oprah* or *Donahue*. I venture to say if you want to find the leading cause of Domestic Violence, the subject is worth a second look. It is an intrinsic part of the Emotional Void's nature to focus on Symptoms when examination of the Problem is what is called for.



Viktor Davis thumbed through the now-diminishing stack of papers. He finds himself drawn to several sheets of white notepaper torn from a small pad. 'Coco Chanel', 'Colleen Doran'. He scans the ensuing sentence fragments quickly and then reviews them more carefully. 'There are exceptions.' The 'are' is underlined several times. 'Sensibility is an altogether different matter from outward manifestation. In seeking to identify and characterise the Female Void, Viktor Davis was attempting to show his reader that there was a much larger game afoot. What appeared to be Male Dominance of the global village amounted to *pay no attention to the Wife and Kids behind the curtain.* In a genuine Patriarchy there would be no such thing as marriage. In point of fact, in a Patriarchy, Merged Permanence would probably be illegal in a contractual sense. The Wisdom of Fathers (contemplating the inevitability of the Male Heart and Groin compelling their owner to capitulate to a Devouring Emotional Void) would mandate that no monetary resources could be sacrificed on the altar of the Would-Be Venus.' This was followed by several false starts which were crossed out. Beneath these, Viktor Davis had written 'get to the point'.

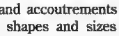
Indeed.

The point, of course, was that the Male Light was not the exclusive property of Men. It was very *close* to being the exclusive property of Men, but as Viktor Davis had reminded himself, 'there *are* exceptions'. In the case of self-publishing (Viktor Davis' idea of self-publishing was best summed up by Don Simpson's promotional slogan: "One Comic Book. One Universe. Why Pay More?"), there were the indisputable contributions of Colleen Doran and Teri Wood. The problem, of course, in acknowledging exceptions in the Female Void-Dominated Age, was that exception was always extrapolated into being a Universal Truth. This was the shaky foundation upon which Feminism was (and is) built. There were (and are) women who begin their sentences with 'I believe . . .' or 'I think . . .' And they *do* think. They have reasoned and coherent world views. They realise that inspiration is simply the starting point, that without dedication, hard work, and an avoidance of the Rapacious Voids which dominate our civilisation, the 'hard, gem-like flame' becomes wavery or is

extinguished. This sensibility occurs more often — *far* more often — in men than it does in women. This is not bigotry, this is not sexism, it is a fact which is supported by empirical evidence. The Brontë Sisters are not William Shakespeare, Madame Curie is not Albert Einstein, Florence Nightingale is not Louis Pasteur, Penny Marshall is not Orson Welles, Joan of Arc is not Jesus Christ. The Male Light is not a genderless thing, but it occurs where it occurs and *sometimes* (not often) it occurs in women. Where the Male Light occurs, it must overcome all manner of adversity, not the least of which is the war between the Heart and the Mind. The mistake Feminism makes is in thinking (or, rather, *feeling*) that legislation can be passed to eliminate adversity and, in this, it has been quite successful, to the general detriment of our society. The Founders of Feminism, those with Good Brains and the ability to Reason and Contribute, in regarding the babbling cacophony of the 'I feel . . .' Brigade they have unleashed upon the world in the name of numerical parity in all areas of human endeavour, have much to reflect on. I doubt that they do (or will). But I think they should.

The Coco Chanel reference was to the founder and driving force of the French design house (to whom I referred allegorically in *Jaka's Story* when I introduced Lord Julius' fashionable young wife, Astoria, whose simple and elegant clothing had caused such a stir in Palnu's court, making all of the other Great Ladies' attire seem gaudy and tasteless). For the benefit of the male reader, I'll point out that Jackie's pink number in Dallas was a Chanel. Chanel, after Coco's death, has been taken over by men who are busily adding flourishes and accoutrements of all tasteless and gaudy shapes and sizes to the Chanel designs. The Seminal Light of her innovation is consumed by the Devouring Void of greed, expediency and fad.

There *are* exceptions.



Viktor Davis reread the passage about Patriarchy and sat staring out the window for some time. The balancing act in which he was engaged was a delicate one. In trying not to belabour his points, there was a real danger of passing over salient arguments too quickly. The Emotional Void relied almost exclusively on contradictory anecdotal evidence. 'Not *all* women are like that; I have a friend who . . .' Overarching beliefs, large verities, universal truths were dismissed as generalisations. Viktor Davis stared out the window for several more minutes and then began typing.

'Men like Cars. Viktor Davis doesn't like Cars. Viktor Davis is a Man.'

These observations were all true statements. Was it a syllogism? Or was there another name for it? Viktor Davis was uncertain. To the Reasoning Mind and to the Emotional Void, the fundamental structure was sound. They were all true statements, though they appeared contradictory. Using those three statements as a template, Viktor Davis had spent much of his adult life attempting to Reason with the Female Emotional Void. In each case, whatever success he had had (and he had had very little success) had been temporary. He considered his lack of success to be central to the Issue at Hand. Within the context of the Female Emotional Void, no general observation could be considered sound if there existed an anecdotal refutation.

Birth and Death.

There is too much Birth in the world and there is not enough Death.

How can you say that? wails the Female Emotional Void. *Just the other day in the newspaper, I read about a family of four who were . . .*

I'm not saying, interrupted Viktor Davis, that people don't die. What I am saying is that there is not enough Death. I'm not saying, he added, that babies don't make people ecstatically happy. I'm saying that there is too much Birth. Those are two very different things. If you could create a four-dimensional model consisting of two spheres, one representing Birth and the other representing Death, the former sphere, observed over the last four hundred years, would be growing larger and larger, faster and faster. The latter sphere would be growing smaller and smaller, faster and faster.

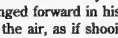
Our planet will double its population in the next ten years. Given that it is our society's collective Emotional Void Response that we are *not* overpopulated, my Reasoning Mind is moved to ask, when does overpopulation occur? If eight billion is not overpopulated, then what is? Fifteen billion? Eighty billion? One hundred billion?

I'm trying very hard to paint you the Big Picture. Patriarchy, to me, is a red herring, a false premise. Which is more successful, Birth or Death? I'm asking you to picture the two as Organisms. The individual, lower-case births and deaths which make up those two Organisms are like molecules. A molecule

within an elephant is not an elephant. Birth is Female. Death is Male.

Which is more successful?

If you are unable to see what I'm saying, then I think that proves my point. The Emotional Void is winning. This is not a Patriarchy. It is a Matriarchy. If it ever was a Patriarchy, it was in a time and place where there was a balance between Death and Birth. You'd have to go back a long, long way to find a civilisation and an era where that was true.



'Oh, NO! *No* way. Uh-uh.' Jeff Smith is shaking his head violently from side to side. He has lunged forward in his seat, his hands waving in the air, as if shooing away a large insect. All of his movements are agitated. At the other end of the couch, his wife sits, her feet tucked beneath her, calmly smoking a Marlboro Light. Her features are inscrutable. Viktor Davis takes another sip of his beer.

'You'd agree that Death is Male?' he asks.

'Yes.'

'You'd agree that Birth is Female?'

'Yes.'

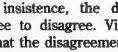
'Which one is winning?'

'No. No, no way. It's just not true.' He stares straight ahead for a moment or two and then looks at Viktor Davis. 'I just don't think that way, man. I just can't see that at all.'

Vijaya grinds out her cigarette in a small glass ashtray.

At Jeff's insistence, the discussion ends. They agree to disagree. Viktor Davis isn't certain what the disagreement is, but clearly an impasse has been reached.

They begin to discuss animation instead.



Viktor Davis had been through his pile of paper many, many times in the last two weeks or so. One of the newspaper clippings (from the *London Observer* in late 1993), sent to him by a *Cerebus* fan, had gone missing. It concerned the cleanup of the Exxon Valdez oil spill. It seemed that the average cost to rehabilitate the local wildlife had come to something on the order of $40,000 per seal. Two of the more expensive reclaimed subjects had been released back into the sea at a special ceremony. Inside of five minutes they were both eaten by a killer whale.

All stories are true. Was the story apocryphal? Possibly. Was the story a hoax? It could very well be. Whether the story happened or not, whether the cost of reclamation is exaggerated, at the core there is, to me, a great truth. Where Emotion supersedes Reason, where Compassion overrules Thought, you will end up spending thousands of dollars to clean up a killer whale's dinner for him. You will do many things that are equally absurdist in their nature. It is, to me, a centerpiece of the Female Emotional Void viewpoint that a seal covered in oil is seen only as a potential mummy seal or daddy seal or (come on, you can take it) someone's little boy seal or little girl seal. It is beyond the capacities of the Female Emotional Void to see the furry little creature as Whale Food.

A seal is dying.

Somewhere, right now, a furry little thing with big black puppy-dog eyes is being ground to pulp in the jaws of a killer whale. Blood is geysering from severed arteries, bones are splintering into needle-thin fragments. Somewhere else, a litter of seal pups suckles at its mother's teats.

The one is not a good thing and the other a bad thing. They are both necessary. Between the two a balance is maintained. There are enough seals to eat the things that seals eat, and there are enough seals to feed the things that eat seals. You would do seals no favour by having the United Nations Security Council pass a resolution granting them a Seal Homeland protected, by a multinational peacekeeping force, from killer whales. You would do the seals no favour by developing Seal Fertility Drugs and Surrogate Mother Seals for those seals unable to conceive on their own. Even if you managed, over a period of years, to airlift in a large enough supply of fish so that No Little Seal Would Go To Bed Hungry, the best that you could accomplish is an Exponentially Rising Seal Population. Soon you would need an expanded peacekeeping force to keep the seals from killing each other, as well as keeping the killer whales at bay. The resources required to build adequate housing for the seals and to maintain an adequate supply of fish would double and redouble faster and faster.

One of the acknowledged masters of the cartooning field, Winsor McCay, did a cartoon some decades ago depicting Death and Time. Death stands hunched over a long scroll, crossing off a name. Time is bearing away a coffin marked Old Age. The former

says *He Was Too Old To Think* (emphasis mine). The latter replies *Yes. And He Encumbered The Earth.* The cartoon is entitled *Death Is Kind and Necessary.* The sub-heading is *It Wipes Off the Human Slate, Makes Way for New Ideas* (again, emphasis mine).

Life out of balance.

We are already past the point of no return. I think it is no coincidence that the last organized attempt in this century to institutionalize genocide (the Nazi Death Camps) constituted little more than a flesh wound inflicted by the Death Sphere upon the Birth Sphere. World War II ended with the dropping of two Atomic Bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. I don't, for one minute, deny the human suffering involved, the families and cultures which were decimated by the conflict. What I am saying is that We Have a Problem. We seem to be unable to confront the fact that Death has become impotent. Even if we applied all of the resources of technology to building Space Age Death Camps, even if we could arrive at a consensus of Who Has to Go (everyone with blue eyes, anyone over the age of twenty-five, anyone under six feet tall — I'll use three examples which would include myself in the hopes that you can understand my point, here), it would take several generations before we could even make a dent in the overwhelming advantage that Birth holds over Death.

Instead, we apply the enormous resources of the state of Michigan to stopping Jack Kevorkian from assisting terminally ill patients to commit suicide.

Life out of balance.

WAY out of balance.

WAY WAY WAY out of balance.

The Universal Mother, Birth, has an agenda. It is a very short agenda, consisting of two items: One, childbirth is an inherent right. Two, absolute safety for everyone is the goal of human society. On both counts, She is doing very, very well. In considering a worldwide population of eight billion people, the *relative* number of people who are dying in wars (or 'wars', rather) is very, very small. The *relative* number of people who are dying from diseases is very, very small. The *relative* number of people who are dying from famine is very, very small.

The only answers to these points are Void Emotional, Void Anecdotal. 'How would *you feel* if your family died in a war? How would *you feel* if a friend or relative of yours were dying of AIDS or leukemia? How would *you feel* if everyone in your neighbourhood were in the grip of a famine?' To me, these are not answers. The very underpinnings of the questions imply the Problem. It is Feeling, rather than Reason, which has brought us to this situation.

I'm pointing out to you that we are in the back seat of a car (ALL of us). There is no one in the driver's seat. As a matter of fact, the steering wheel fell off a few decades back. The accelerator is glued to the floor. The doors are welded shut. We are going faster and faster and faster. Take offence, if you will, at my impertinence in pointing this out. Call me heartless, a cold fish (believe me, I'm used to it). Ostracize me and form a worldwide *We're Just Out For a Sunday Drive in the Country* organization. Print up *Faster is Fun* posters. Hug and Kiss each other and Feel Good about yourselves. The Problem is Still There.

Here we go, eh?

The Universal Mother has most of the world's resources at her disposal. Childbirth is an inherent right, worldwide, with the exception of China. And even there, there is only a limit on childbirth, not an outright ban. China has managed to get its National Automobile to the point where it is only going way, way, way too fast, instead of way, way, way, WAY too fast. The news media are divided between two kinds of stories: Feel-Good stories and Feel-Bad stories. The implications of Feel-Bad stories are self-evident. It is a Dangerous World. It is unsafe to go to the corner store, unsafe to be out at night, unsafe to get into your car, unsafe to leave your baby unattended, unsafe to get in an airplane, unsafe to go to school, unsafe to jog, unsafe to sit in your living room, unsafe to leave your door unlocked, unsafe to go into the parking garage, unsafe to get in an elevator. Your neighbour is unsafe, your husband or boyfriend is unsafe, sex is unsafe, Tylenol is unsafe, Pepsi is unsafe, the streets are unsafe, downtown is unsafe, the suburbs are unsafe, being alone is unsafe, having a gun is unsafe, not having a gun is unsafe, swimming pools are unsafe, parks are unsafe, the subway is unsafe.

The Emotional Void is in full control and playing Emotional Tricks on itself. On television, it scares itself shitless and then sells itself material possessions. 'It seemed okay. After all, she had know him for years. He was a friend, a schoolmate. She got into

the car at 9.42 P.M. And that was when the nightmare began.' Pregnant pause. 'When we come back, a mother remembers.' 'Do you ever get a headache that just won't go away?'

At 9.42 that night, all around the world, girls were getting into cars with men that they knew. Millions of them. Billions of them. They went out for a soda. They stopped by and visited some friends. They did some research at the library. They went to band practice. They returned home and tried a new hairstyle. They talked on the phone to their girlfriend for about an hour and a half. They did their homework. They went to bed. The end.

The odds of being at the center of a Celebrated Crime of Violence are about the same as winning a National Lottery. Losers and Winners. If, instead of focussing on each excruciating detail, a moment-by-moment re-enactment of a Celebrated Crime of Violence, we followed a Lottery winner, moment by moment, re-enacting His or Her Last Day as a Poor Person, the last half-hour before the winning number was announced, eyewitness accounts from everyone who was In the Room, we would be telling ourselves exactly what we are telling ourselves with *A Current Affair, Hard Copy* and all the rest of them. Nothing. Zip. Nada. This thing happened to this person. Implicit in this is not just 'it *could* happen to you'. It is fundamentally important for the Female Emotional Void, central to her advocacy of Merged Permanence, that the message be 'it is *likely* to happen to you, it is practically *inevitable* that it will happen to you'. Find a nice guy, settle down, have kids. Don't take any chances. Don't look for trouble and trouble won't look for you. 'I'm bored' has become the universal refrain. Put on *A Current Affair*. See that girl? Just an ordinary, fun-loving seventeen-year-old, just like you. She was probably 'bored' too, don't you think? And now look — look at her mother crying, look at the shocked expressions of disbelief on the faces of her classmates. Look at her favourite teacher choking back his tears. You're 'bored'? Count yourself lucky, Missy. That girl probably wishes she were 'bored' right now. But it's too late for her. She just had to go out and have 'fun', didn't she?

Fear. Our Merged Female Emotional Void Heritage is nearly universal. We are being made afraid of everything. Bad things do happen. Bad things happen to everyone. When was the last time a Bad Thing happened to you? Not a bad thing, a Bad Thing? The best part about Fear as Lifestyle is that you will eventually be proven right. It may take a few weeks, it may take a year, five years, ten years, but if you face each day Numb with the Certainty that Something Bad is Going to Happen, it eventually will. I knew it. I just knew something Bad was going to happen today.

A Coward dies a Thousand Deaths, the Hero dies but Once.

I agree with that sentiment, except for the 'Hero' part. I'd replace that with 'the Thinking Person'.

People have been known to spontaneously combust. It *does* happen. The difference between people who wear only flame-retardant clothing and carry a fire extinguisher with them wherever they go and the manner in which the majority of our population conducts its day-to-day affairs is one of degree only.

During the great polio epidemics of this century, whole neighbourhoods were scrubbed clean. Pesticides were sprayed on every tree, every inch of lawn. Whole communities mobilised in a concerted effort to eliminate any likely or even remotely possible source for the pestilence. When the polio vaccine was discovered, it was found that the source of the disease was a bacteria found in raw sewage, to which humans had previously been immune because they used to be exposed to it in trace amounts over extended periods.

No! Bad! That's dirty!

DIR-TEE!

Checkmate, said Viktor Davis.

He smiled and lit another cigarette.

No, not you.

Me.

I'm looking at the biggest chessboard it is possible for me to imagine. My side is Reason. Your side is Emotion. I can't move my king. Here are the news media and popular culture, scampering wildly in the direction of the latest example of Anecdotal Human Misery, cameras bobbing, microphones thrust before the latest Suspect. Did you do it? How do you Feel? The Victim's family. Do you think he did it? How do you Feel?

Check.

Here is the Absolute Right to Give Birth. Babies having babies. The human population doubling and redoubling. It reminds me of the story of the commoner who did a great favour for a King and was granted a boon. He asked only that the King put one piece of grain on the first square of his chessboard, two grains on the second square, four grains on the third square, eight grains on the fourth square and so on. By the time the thirtieth square had been filled, the King's granaries had been emptied. By the time the fortieth square had been filled, the King owed the commoner all the wheat his kingdom could produce for the next ten years. *All stories are true.*

Check.

Here are all of the mechanisms for changing direction, occupied by televised portrayals of Husbands and Fathers. No legislation can be passed which jeopardizes the Absolute Right to Give Birth. Every child must be fed. Three square meals a day. Clothing. Shelter. Mothers' Allowances. Ninety-eight per cent of Child Support is paid by men to women.

Check.

Reason can't defeat Emotion in an argument because in an Emotional Argument you just go around and around in rhetorical circles until you become Happy again and then the argument's over.

Check.

Mate.

Merged Permanence, the Emotional Female Void, surveyed the board uneasily. The Universal Maternal Visage brightened.

What about . . .?

The Brightness vanished.

Oh. Right.

Viktor Davis took another drag from his cigarette. There was a great serenity in his level gaze.

Maybe you could move your . . .

The two were silent for a time. Viktor Davis calmly smoked his cigarette. The Emotional Female Void looked up at him and flashed a friendly smile which Viktor Davis did not return. The Emotional Female Void returned to studying the situation on the board. The corners of Her mouth twisted downwards, frustration and misery etching long, hard lines in Her features. Tears started from Her eyes.

Without looking up, she asked:

What should I do?

Viktor Davis continued to smoke, drawing out the moment, increasing the tension in the air. At last he said:

'*You* won,' and then he added, '*you* tell *me*.'

Viktor Davis pushed back from the chessboard. He stood up and took a last drag from his cigarette. He expelled the smoke in a small series of concentric rings. He reached across the board and lightly flicked his cigarette. Swirling ashes fell like the first winter snow on his opponent's queen, catching here and there in her crown and in the moulded curves of her majestic form, settling onto the black square she occupied and the white and black squares adjacent to her.

He turned and walked towards the door.

WHAT SHOULD I DO?

It was the plaintive cry of a wounded animal, a frightened child lost in the woods.

WHAT SHOULD I

Viktor Davis closed the door behind him, cutting off the piercing crescendo of the Voice which was breaking, overtaken and consumed by Emotion, which the Voice was incapable of restraining, before which the Voice was as helpless as a sapling in a tornado.

Viktor Davis sat forward on his chair. His hands were folded together, resting against the lower half of his face, his elbows on his knees.

Exception entered the room.

You're very young, *Viktor Davis thought to himself, but said nothing. There was a kind of concern on Exception's face, but it consisted more of observation and assessment than it did of empathy or emotion. Beneath that cosmetic surface, strange imagery swam, fragments of ideas and intuitions, creative seedlings which might take root, might one day come to something. Or might not.*

You okay? asked Exception.

Viktor Davis briefly considered answering Define okay, *simply for the literary effect. Fortunately the time for literary effects was past.*

I'm fine, he said. How are you doing?

Good, replied Exception. I have an idea for a . . .

A passing ambulance or police car or fire

engine drowned out the rest of the words. Story? Song? Play? Painting? Animated cartoon?

That's good, said Viktor Davis, smiling.

You never explained why men have beards, said Exception.

Viktor Davis laughed. He was quiet for a time and then he reached for his cigarettes.

We bit off her dick, he said. That's why we have more of It than she does. More violence, more creativity, more Light. A man's beard can be summed up as 'Pay no attention to the Seminal Act of Extreme Violence Behind The Curtain'. How many menstrual cramps does it take to paint the Mona Lisa?

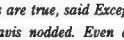
Exception considered this. That's pretty far-fetched, Exception said.

Viktor Davis smiled. If you'll recall, I said I I know why men have beards and women don't. I didn't say I knew for sure.

All stories are true, said Exception.

Viktor Davis nodded. Even a story that says 'all stories are false' is true.

What was all that stuff about Scheherezade and the Sword of Damocles about?



Viktor Davis smiled.

Most of what I've been saying here, I think you'll agree, is pretty controversial stuff. If you consider it controversial now, you can imagine what it was like carrying it around with you through John Lennon's murder, eight years of Ronald Reagan, four years of George Bush, the Gulf War, the murder of fourteen female engineering students by Marc Lepine in Montreal, Lorena Bobbitt, Janet Reno authorizing the assault on David Koresh's little Waco shindig.

I really do see it as a series of chessboards. Most things that happen in our world don't really change much on the chessboards. The news stories that go away in a hurry, like Tonya Harding, might represent the movement of a pawn on the next chessboard up. Something like JFK's assassination represents a simultaneous movement of several pieces which go a long way up and out to the Big, Bigger, Biggest chessboards. When I put Margaret Thatcher in the book and she was forced to resign by her male cabinet a few months later, well, when you're someone like me who believes in synchronicity, who is not intellectually equipped to explain something away as a coincidence, that can be a pretty unsettling experience. The worst part was that I knew I was still four or five years away from Getting to the Point. Was I playing on the same chessboard as Margaret Thatcher? Did I just knock off her queen? And how was that going to go over with the queen on the next chessboard up? It's tough to play a game when you don't know what board you're on or what the rules are. Thatcher's resignation was followed by an amazing series of Behind Closed Doors scandals, much bigger fish than myself crushed by the Sexual Harassment Juggernaut. They changed the laws in Canada so that a woman couldn't give her consent when she was drunk and a man couldn't plead innocent because of drunkenness. I seriously considered turning myself in. 'Look, I don't remember what her name was, but she was a nurse at Freeport Hospital. She was drunk and I was drunk. As a law-abiding, public-spirited citizen, I want to turn myself in.' I probably would have, but, really, all I could do was keep going. The only real *card I had to play was knowing that the Point, the Point that would get me in the most trouble with the Female Emotional Void, was in issues 181 to 186, not 287 to 300. That's why I'm writing this in June instead of August, as I ordinarily would be for a September release. It was the Run for the Roses. Maybe I could catch Her sleeping or something.*

Viktor Davis laughed.

And then I'm getting ready to go out one Friday night and I just happen to turn on the television and there's O.J. Simpson and his buddy on a nice little 40-mile-an-hour jaunt down 405 with a dozen police cars following them. I could definitely relate.

Exception laughed. So you made it?

Viktor Davis grinned. To quote a great philosopher of modern times, It Ain't Over 'Til It's Over. Cerebus *is a very weird little commodity in the context of the Female Emotional Void Age. It's too small to pay attention to and too big to ignore. 184 hasn't even come out yet. The collected* Reads *won't be out for almost a year and that's where most people read the book: in the collected form. It wouldn't be that big a stretch to categorize* Reads *as Hate Literature against women. All it would take is for one woman to be disturbed enough by* Reads *to file a lawsuit, or a women's group to file a class-action suit, in this Fascistic Feminist country and that would be the ball game, wouldn't it?*

Does that worry you?

Not especially. They could ban the book, seize the house and all of the inventory, all of the artwork, and burn it. Copies of it would still be out there. As long as I can have a pad of paper and a ball-point pen in my prison cell, I'll be happier than a pig in shit. Clean and sober, three square meals a day, an exercise

room to work out in. No monthly deadline. Sounds like a lot less pressure to me.

Viktor Davis grew serious.

Don't ever be afraid, he said. FDR was right. The only thing we have to fear is fear itself. I might get to the end of Cerebus *and I might not. I could get hit by a bus, I could get cancer, I could lose my right hand, my eyesight, I could fall in love and get married.*

Exception was unable to conceal profound astonishment.

Viktor Davis laughed. I'm not immune, you know. All of those things have happened to better men than me. If you look at the casualty figures in any creative field, the odds are pretty good that I'll die in poverty, the work itself completely forgotten. The other option, if you're talking about house odds, is that I end up married to some tyrannical Queen of the Circus. Love is blind. It's also deaf, dumb and stupid. If What's-Her-Boobs can do that to Hugh Hefner, what we are talking about is a very large and very determined Force of Nature. You can walk as carefully as you want through a mine field; it is still a mine field. But it's also true that if you step up to the plate worrying that you're going to strike out, the odds are that you're going to strike out. Not doing a large ambitious work because you're convinced that Danger Lurks Around Every Corner, the old 'I might be dead this time next year', is a waste of the Inner Radiance that found you. It's like life insurance. It's betting against yourself. It's blowing out your own flame before someone beats you to it.

Night had fallen and Viktor Davis seemed to become less substantial, seemed to merge with the surrounding darkness. Only the edges of his features were clear, illuminated as he was from behind.

Remember that you're just a custodian for It. You can be a good custodian, a so-so custodian or a bad custodian. You can make It a pile of smouldering twigs or you can make It a bonfire. The Male Light or the Female Void. I'm telling you that you have to choose. I'm telling you that if you think you can have both, you are mistaken, that you have already made your choice in that case.

Was Exception growing or was Viktor Davis shrinking?

You're getting larger, said Viktor Davis. We're going our separate ways. A six-inch-by-nine-inch image area is a very cramped environment. You're not in here anymore. You're out there. And I'm just the voice in your head. Back to the way it used to be.

He smiled.

Well, not quite *the way it used to be.*

Victor Davis did not elaborate.

Consensus and Exception merged once more. Rather, Consensus and some Exceptions merged. Other Exceptions, feeling the first icy brush of the Merged Void against them, edged slightly apart from it. As they felt the weak gravitational tug, they moved even further from it, compressing their own awareness within themselves. Several hard, gem-like flames flared into new existence.

'Shine on,
You Crazy Diamond.'

Pink Floyd
Wish You Were Here

AARDVARK COMMENT

P.O. BOX 1674, STATION 'C', KITCHENER, ONTARIO N2G 4R2

The publishers of Cerebus *comic magazine regret to inform the readership that Mr. David Sim, as of July 5, 1994, had made himself completely unavailable for his responsibilities as respondent in the pages of Aardvark Comment. Having completed the final instalment of* Reads *on 30 June, and very much afraid that he might consume his body weight in cheeseburgers and shoot out the picture tube of his television, he has opted instead for several days of rest, 75 cc.s of Jack Daniels to be administered at four hour intervals and extensive re-readings of* Milk & Cheese *collections.*

In his absence, we are pleased to present three letters in essay form. For your dancing and listening pleasure, we present J.M. Layne of Monmouth, Oregon, Shakespeare's Sister of Greenville, North Carolina and Sky Woodruff of Washington, DC.

Mr. Sim promises to return when the swelling goes down.

Dear Mr. Sim,

I finally made it to a comic book convention after some ten years of collecting but I was hard pressed to find anything but X-books (nobody had even heard of *Pirate Corps,* "Is that — uh — a comic or a card?"). So when I found a box full of *Cerebii,* I eagerly stocked up on back issues.

And now forgive me for dredging up old news, but I'm eager to correct a few of your misapprehensions on the subject of wealth as set forth in your replies to Messrs., Shum, Donovan, and Beechen (*Cerebus* 171, 174, 175 respectively) in the hollow halls of Aardvark Comment.

First: the nature of wealth. As a budding Economics Minor, I feel it is my duty to point out that money is not equivalent to wealth. In your reply to Mr. Shum's letter you advocate creating a "universal currency in sufficient quantities" to repay the world's accumulated debt. No, no, no! Creating "enough" currency, whether universal or national (though I doubt the nations of the world could overcome their national pride even to produce something so conducive to trade as a common currency: note the EC's monetary troubles), to pay off the world's accumulated debts wouldn't solve any problems. It would instead create skyrocketing inflation, much lamenting in the cities of Man, and quite possibly the End of Western Civilization.

The world's resources are unfortunately limited, but Man's desire knows no bounds (economics in a nutshell). Pumping more money into the economy wouldn't change the amount of resources available to an economy to produce those consumer goods and services that do satisfy human needs and wants. Also: if a greater amount of money is chasing the same amount of goods, prices are going to go up. (This is where that lamenting in the cities of Man stuff comes in.) If Joe Citizen has spent the last 40 or 50 years building a nest egg, he's going to be pretty pissed when his government effectively cuts his bank account balance in two, or three, or four, . . . If the governments of the world were to print money to repay their debts, they'd be repaying their creditors with money worth less than it was when they borrowed. Government bonds would become very unattractive (not to mention superfluous, since the government could just print all the money it wanted). Since most government debt is owned by private citizens, the government would be effectively defaulting on its loans, taxing without representation and picking the citizenry's pockets, depending on how you look at it. All together, the effects of indiscriminately printing money could destabilize a currency until the economy goes up in a giant fiscal fireball.

Second: the composition of the money supply. You tell Mr. Shum that the money to solve the world's problems "should actually be printed" rather than existing merely as an hallucination. Well, there isn't actually enough paper and coin extant to honor the amount of money in the world's checking accounts: only about 25% of the money we use to measure wealth in our daily lives is in physical form. The majority of our money supply exists largely as electronic records in the world's central banks. You use the creation of Euro-dollars to finance the rebuilding of Germany after WWII as an example of money creation. But you ignore the distinction between judicious and uncontrolled monetary policy. Germany needed Euro-dollars because it had destroyed its economy by printing millions of Marks in a futile attempt to pay its war reparations from WWI. Those bundles of bank-notes made nifty building blocks for the kiddies (look in any economics text, you'll probably be able to find some unhappy looking chap paying for his cup of coffee with a barrel-full of cash) but all that wood pulp would have been better left as trees.

Third: the gold standard. In *Cerebus* 175 you tell Mr. Beechen: "Once the US Dropped the gold standard . . . we dropped . . . even the pretence that money was based on anything." Well, surprise, surprise, money has never been based on anything with intrinsic value as wealth, even when it was made out of gold. In Mr. Donovan's excellent summation of the unhappy history of John Law (*Cerebus* 174) he makes an important mistake. Mr. Donovan states that "as long as the people believed [that the receipts were backed by gold] . . . it was as if real money had been created." Real money HAD been created. Money is anything the public accepts in exchange for labor, land, property, etc. Even the gold and silver that once backed our national currencies had no (and have no) intrinsic value as wealth. (Outside of its use in certain scientific applications and its aesthetic value in jewelry and such, gold is a particularly worthless metal.) Money is a measure of wealth not wealth itself. Money is useful only as an economic

lubricant: it allows symbolic representation of wealth so that we can avoid the clumsiness of barter. Money has no intrinsic worth. The startling and wonderful fact is that money *is* an hallucination, but only so much as love, democracy, nation, or any other abstract concept is an hallucination. Money — to reiterate — has no intrinsic value: it's worth whatever the public at large thinks it is.

Fourth: monetary policy. But the government still creates money, right? Right. In the US the Treasury prints Federal Reserve Notes, the Fed introduces them into the economy, and Congress has passed laws ensuring their wide acceptability ("all debts public and private") as money. But the public decides how much they're worth.

Paper money is backed by public trust. Way back when trade started heating up across the Mediterranean and the new merchant class decided to stage a forced march out of the Middle Ages, a few goldsmiths in the Italian city-states began issuing promissory notes for the value of the gold they held in their vaults. Two things quickly became apparent: it's much easier to carry a piece of paper in your pocket than it is to lug a couple of pounds of coin around everywhere you go, and, if you're a highly respected and trusted goldsmith, almost nobody wanted to take their gold out of your vaults. Eventually all that gold lying idle in their vaults introduced strange ideas into the goldsmiths' brains. What if a particularly daring goldsmith were to loan his brother Guido (who already had a ship — all he needed was some cash to buy supplies and hire a crew and — Boom — he'd discover a new trade route to India) fifty pounds of gold just by writing him a note? It was irresistible: Guido gets his cash, our goldsmith gets a few Lira back as interest when Guido returns from India, and there is suddenly, mysteriously, more money in the economy than there was yesterday.

Guido got his cash and thus the fractional banking system was born. These days, the government controls the amount of money in the economy by telling the banks what percentage of their demand deposits they are allowed to lend to third parties. And banks these days don't issue promissory notes or shovel cash out of their vaults. they open up new checking accounts in the lendee's name. As long as the majority of people write checks and use credit cards, the economy only needs that 26% cash to honor withdrawal requests.

What if everyone tries to withdraw their money at the same time? What if Guido's ship sinks? That's what the FDIC is for. Just as currency works just fine unbacked by precious metals, demand deposits work just fine unbacked by currency . . . if the public has faith in the government's ability to maintain productivity.

Since money is necessary to facilitate trade, governments do find it necessary to create money at times and, in inflationary periods, to destroy it as well (by reducing the percentage of reserves banks are allowed to lend). But, because the public trust is so important in maintaining the value of the national currency, governments (those in the most experienced and industrialized of nations anyway) take great pains to ensure that money is created by independent agencies (the Federal Reserve Board in the US) to avoid conflicts of interest. The government does have the ability to issue new money, but if the US were to repay its bonds by creating money the value of the dollar would be in danger.

Fifth: forgiving debt. When England's war debts were forgiven money was destroyed, not created. At the end of WWII the US owned England's debt: England's liability was an asset to America. Debt is, in effect, money (Federal Reserve Notes represent the US government's debt to the holder). Like the repayment of a loan, forgiving a debt destroys an asset to the owner and a liability to the debtor. When the US decided to forgive England's debt it destroyed money.

Sixth: financing the deficit. When Congress votes money to California for emergency relief, it is not creating money, it is "financing the deficit". When a government spends more than it has, it creates public debt. This debt is financed by selling bonds. Bonds are not money. Therefore no money is created when somebody gives the government fifty dollars in exchange for a piece of paper. (Whether this is wise or not is another matter. The public debt is financed on a rolling basis: old bond holders are paid off by issuing new bonds. Fifteen cents of every US tax dollar already goes to finance the public debt).

Seventh: the greed of man. You're correct when you say the industrial nations want to retain their access to the world's raw materials. Production, after all, produces real wealth. You are also right in pointing out the ubiquitous nature of graft. Greed is the cornerstone of modern economics. But no one wants "a worldwide series of economic convulsions." It would be bad for business.

Eighth: a few implications of economic theory on Estarcion. The city-states in the Aardvarkian Age are quite financially sophisticated. Although gold coins are still in circulation, bank-notes are widely accepted and apparently not tied to any gold standard. Lord Julius devalued the New Sepran Crown when Cerebus' troops crossed its borders which would have been unnecessary (and impossible: gold is gold) with a gold standard. Unbacked currency may be something of a status symbol: when Jaka visited Cerebus in *High Society* he bragged that he had "real paper [crowns] . . . not the lousy gold crowns like you have in the lower city . . ." The torment Cerebus suffered from Lord Julius' tinkering with interest and exchange rates may explain his preoccupation with more gold when he became Pope. Gold is relatively stable.

Judging by Pud's reaction to Cerebus' gold coin, and Dino's financial arrangements — he's rebuilding his bar with the *interest* on that gold coin — Cirin must have not only confiscated Cerebus's entire gold hoard for her Ascension bid, but also closed Iest's borders to assure no gold entered Iest. Had she not done this, Boobah — who got away with a whole bag of gold — wouldn't have to work as a stenographer in Palnu: he'd own all of Iest.

The lower city doesn't seem to be in any great financial trouble, so the "real paper" Crowns of the upper city must have made their way down the mountain. But while paper Crowns may have successfully replaced the gold Crown in the lower city, outside of Iest they would be worth very little. Since foreign currencies haven't been subjected to the gold shock the Iestian Crown has had, those foreign currencies would be worth much more in relation to the Iestian Crown (if

one Palnan Crown could be traded for a gold coin, how many barrels full of Iestian Crowns would it be worth?).

I wonder if Cirin took measures to remove foreign currency from Iest's economy when she invaded? If she didn't, those fortunate traders holding Palnan, or even New Sepran, crowns would have become very wealthy after the borders closed. If Iestian merchants demand payment in the stronger foreign currencies this would somewhat offset the economic isolation caused by lack of gold. But foreign paper Crowns — no matter what city-state they come from — could never become as valuable as the rare gold coins. Foreign Crowns would flow into Iest through open borders, satisfying import merchants' demand, but the amount of gold in the city would remain fixed.

Inside the city, Iestian crowns would be very popular with foreigners. In fact, since the Iestian Crown is now cheaper for foreigners, Iest would have seen a marked increase in exports and tourism as citizens of other city-states traveled to Iest to take advantage of the devalued Crown.

(If Cirin did close the city to foreign currencies, how did Dino's contractor manage to buy imported kerosene lamps with devalued Crowns? He must have used copper bits. Cerebus only hoarded gold, so all foreign trade could be carried out with copper.)

Should Cirin want to pump up the economy even further she could reintroduce the gold standard on a special Export Crown issue. These new Export Crowns could be backed by the big golden sphere she has in the back yard and used to trade with other city-states. She's already issued new paper money from "Cirin's Bank of Iest" (*Cerebus* 164), is it backed by anything other than Cirinist might? She'd better be careful if it is: Lord Julius or somebody of his ilk might corner the market on Export Crowns and foreclose on her big ball just to be contrary.

Somebody's going to have to introduce something like the Export Crown before the gates are opened and all that gold is allowed back into the cities economy (the Cirinists do claim to be only a temporary occupation force right?). If not, well I'm sure we'll all enjoy the pretty pictures of the citizenry of Iest running amuck (with backgrounds of the city in flames by Gerhard).

There. I'm done now.

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★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

Okay, fine. I've been saying for some weeks now that I intended to write, and the Aardvark Comment in #180 has finally compelled my thought into action. I'm writing partially in response to Zobnek and partially to S. McNimbus. To the latter, let me say that YES, it is entirely possible to mix comics and women, and to explain that, I'll hopefully delight Zobnek by spilling my life story — the expurgated version, of course.

To start with, I am NOT a normal woman. Oh, sure, I may look normal, but scratch the surface, and you'll find the thin veneer covers a core of solid eccentricity, and I'm proud of it. I LIKE not being a conformist, a good li'l lemming who believes everything her parents, preacher and president tell her.

I didn't start out that way, mind you. In high school, I was a bespectacled, be-zitted egghead with whom none of the Popular Guys would be caught dead (yeah, yeah, yeah — get out the violins and hankies), and, fueled by a hormonally induced drive to be Popular, to go out on dates, to be Normal, I tried to fit in. I did everything short (O, thank God I didn't fall to such depths) of trying out for cheer-leading. Nothing worked; the cliques were closed, and I was left to wallow in tear-sodden teen angst.

But by the time I was 18, we had moved to another state, I had gotten contacts and, thanks to strong medicine, my skin had cleared; nothing had reduced my IQ, not even the desperate flirting and giggling, but I was now at least tolerable to gaze upon, and the change in locale allowed me to shed the chains my reputation had forged and rebuild myself. Unfortunately, the hormones hadn't died down, and, having reached the ripe old age of 18 and never having been so much as kissed, I promptly allowed Mr. Wrong to deflower my virgin lips.

It was rather like being attacked by one of those face-huggers from *Alien*, really — if face-huggers are capable of having pepperoni pizza breath. Needless to say, I was put off by the idea of kissing for quite some time after that — six years, to be exact. To top it all off, the guy laughed at me and said it was my fault the experience was horrible because I didn't know what I was doing, and, stupidly, I believed him, thus creating a vast pit of insecurity about my own sensuality/sexuality.

Sometime after that minor trauma, I Grew Up. Getting a boyfriend was no longer the *raison d'etre* of my life; I started college — and I did NOT pledge a sorority! Guys faded in importance as I ploughed through a double major in 4 years, then began working on my Masters in English literature. By the time I hit grad school, I was so anti-social, rumors circulated that I was a closet lesbian. The fact was, I no longer needed to define myself in relation to a man, and most of my female peers couldn't understand that. I view myself as an independent woman, capable of taking care of myself. Unlike so many poor, deluded women who have bought into the roles Society has tried (and mostly succeeded) in forcing on them, i.e. Goodwife, Earth Mother, Competent Working Gal who can take a bit of manly joking from her sexist pig of a boss and not scream sexual harassment, I don't need a man to prove that I have worth as a person . . . That last bit probably makes me sound like a rabid feminist, a label I rebel against. I just think that I — and every other woman on this planet — should be able to fulfil our dreams and ambitions without constraint. And, for the most part, I think we've reached the point that we can, but there are still major problems out there, mostly with the female mindset, which is STILL geared towards snagging a husband and having babies, which usually eliminates any chance of a career and personal fulfilment. We are NOT in the Middle Ages; there are more options for fulfilment outside the Nuclear Family, which is a joke anyway, and I'm getting vehement, so I'll stop ranting now before I go off on another four pages of vitriol against women who insist on perpetuating the doormat stereotype by submitting in all things to Their Man.

Anyway, at that point, I didn't WANT a boyfriend either. There weren't any men who interested me, only boys who wanted to get laid, and as a (no, I am NOT

kidding) real live virgin, I wasn't about to oblige them. My feelings were that if I couldn't be involved with a man who loved and respected me for myself, without wanting to change me to fit his image of the Perfect Woman, who wouldn't be intimidated by my intelligence, then I wouldn't be involved at all.

Then I met my Significant Other, who was also in grad school. Our first conversations revolved around comics (see, I DID tie it in!); we'd read and been impressed by some of the same things, including *The Watchmen, Arkham Asylum,* and *The Killing Joke.* However, I had given up reading comics about three years previously, disgusted by the lack of quality writing in Marvel and DC comics, which were the only ones I read at the time. During our Getting-To-Know-You phase, he introduced me to his favorite comics, which included *Cerebus.*

By January, 1993, I was ready to admit that my feelings for him were not strictly platonic, but I was paranoid and insecure; after all, even though I was now 24, I had ZERO experience with men. Over the years, I'd convinced myself that because I didn't know anything about — ah — intimate relations, even at the most superficial level, that was all the more reason to keep them at a distance. Plus I had a basic distrust of men; there are a great many assholes (male AND female) who enjoy making other people feel stupid and inferior, and I'd encountered too many of them not to be wary. But he is a very patient man. He's not "cool." He's not "a dweeb." He's just himself, and he doesn't care about labels or about what other people think about him; if you like him, great, if not, he doesn't much care — MY GOD, I LOVE THIS MAN! He's so together, it's scary. How did someone of our generation actually grow up NOT completely neurotic? I'm so glad I waited . . .

Anyway, once I accepted the fact that he really was/is a nice-without-being-insipid guy who like me because, not in spite of my weirdness, I opened up and began to trust him. With a great deal of time and compassion on his part, we made the bumpy transition from friends to lovers. Now, over a year later, we're still together, and I'm still mad about him, and given the fact that I've just poured all this out to a total stranger, I'm obviously less inhibited than I used to be.

Fortunately, he is no more "normal" than I am, and neither is our relationship; I mean, if the man even sent me flowers, I'd think he was possessed by aliens, but that works for us. We don't have to perpetuate the "romantic" stereotypes (or subsidize Hallmark) in order to express our feelings. We don't play silly mind games on each other; we don't get jealous or insecure if the other goes out with friends; we don't scream hurtful things at each other if we're upset. We talk about our problems and try to reach an understanding rather than resort to yelling . . . of course, we don't live with each other, either, and that could be the reason we continue to get on so well. We're both loners, so needless to say, marriage is NOT at the top of our priority list; neither of us think that a couple necessarily has to cohabitate to sustain a fulfilling, successful relationship. In fact, it might be MORE successful if you don't, because then you've both got space and private time.

There once was a time, Dave, that I would have agreed with you: "Love sucks." But, of course, I don't feel that way now. I've changed and grown a lot as a person because of my relationship, and while I would be devastated if we break up, I'm perfectly aware that Life will go on. I'll survive without regrets, because this is just too fucking good to regret! Sure, there's always the possibility that we could break up tomorrow, leaving me a sniveling, sobbing wreck for quite a long while, but I'm willing to take that risk because I'm enjoying being with him NOW. We're best friends, confidants and lovers — how much better could it get?. Carpe diem, man. That's all we got, so we might as well enjoy it.

And although I'm an English major, I'm not a literary snob; I've been reading comics off and on since I was eight, and I've never felt that the art takes away from the story any more than reading a book and going to see the film ruins the book for me. I'm a sucker for a brilliant story no matter what form it comes in; if brilliant art accompanies it, then so much the better . . . Oh, and hey, Dave — I read romance novels, too. In fact, I write the damn things. To me, it's mind-candy; something to read when I cannot read another page of Shakespeare without the risk of speaking in iambic pentameter for the rest of my life. It's escapism . . . and if I could ever revise my manuscript enough to get it accepted, it'd be a nice bit of supplemental income as well.

My point? My life is a John Hughes flick, I like comic books, and it's all my boyfriend's fault that I'm hopelessly addicted to *Cerebus, Sandman* and *Bone.*

The nauseatingly blissful,

Shakespeare's Sister
Greenville, NC
USA

P.S. If it counts for anything, I'm enjoying the Mothers and Daughters storyline a great deal — it seems like your most ambitious and thematically rich plot to date. When Astoria revealed that Cerebus is a hermaphrodite, my boyfriend and I just gaped at each other for a minute, then screeched, "That's fucking BRILLIANT!" It also goes far to explain why he refers to himself as "Cerebus" all the time . . . Anyway, my S.O.'s convinced that the Victor Reid story will have "resonances" (his wording) later, so we're all just real excited 'bout it down here.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Mr. Sim,

I've wanted to write a letter to you for a while, but I haven't because I did not want to seem like one of your unquestioningly loyal fans or like one of the many who choose to discuss their personal lives in the pages of your letter column. However, in the end, it just seemed somehow rude to read the thoughts you express in *Cerebus* every month without introducing myself. And some things have been said in the letter column to which I felt a response was necessary.

First the introductions. Since my name sometimes results in confusion, I guess I should point out that I am a man. I was born and grew up in Albuquerque, New Mexico. I spent my teenage days in private school and my nights going to punk shows. Like the music itself, I have since entered a post-punk phase. I am now a senior at Georgetown University. Although officially my major is Humanities in International Affairs, I have concentrated on American history and government. I was inducted into Phi Beta Kappa after my junior year, and I have one of the ten highest grade

point averages in my class. (I write that only to inform, not to brag, but it does sound cocky, doesn't it? Oh, well.) After graduation, I plan to attend law school; I intend to concentrate on and eventually practice civil rights law. I hadn't read comics for years, but *Cerebus* brought me back. I'm now reading, in addition, *Sandman, Hellblazer, Grendel (Tales), Sin City, Spawn, Wolverine,* and *WildCATS.* Yes, those last three are, to varying degrees, silly superhero comics. But I think Spawn is a slightly different kind of hero; I like Wolverine, and interesting things have been happening to him lately; I like the way Jim Lee draws; and something about *WildCATS* is really enjoyable. I like those comics in the same way I enjoy going to see silly shoot 'em up action movies. I get what I want from them: entertainment. If I want depth I go elsewhere. I enjoy things both complex and simple, and there is room for both.

Now that that is out of the way, on to my thought on some of the things which have been written in Aardvark Comment. In #175, in response to one reader's thoughts on "multicultural" history, you quite correctly pointed out the inanity of attempting to teach every cultural view on history. However, that is not the point to all of us who support more multicultural teaching. Looking at contemporary America and recent American history, I find it hard to believe that what most people learn is really doing much to make them understand one another. To quote Bad Religion, a thoughtful and way cool band, "Our history as it's portrayed is just a recipe for hate." And revising the history that is taught in an attempt to change that means more than just adding other points of view. In the last 20-30 years, a massive amount of historic research has changed the standard academic interpretations of history, and they certainly needed to be changed. Not only did they assume that only famous people and conquerors were important, they ignored central actors, obfuscated facts, and perpetuated a convenient history rather than motivating rigorous academic inquiry.

Les this seem entirely theoretical, I'll provide some examples. For instance, one that has received a great deal of attention on both sides of the so-called political correctness debate: Christopher Columbus. Regardless of how one wants to interpret the man, history as it has been taught has obscured the facts surrounding him. Yes, for modern Europeans he did, most likely, "discover" the Americas. Yes, that encounter has been historically meaningful for the whole world. And yes, people had been living on the land he found for possibly 25,000 years (give or take) when he arrived. But what history classes in American schools teach about this subject is frighteningly one-sided and, more importantly, ignores facts which would create a more complete picture of history.

Columbus' voyage took place in the same year that the Spanish drove the Moors out of the European continent, forcing them back to Africa. Many of the attitudes he, and those he represented, had about non-Europeans were formed, in part, by that experience. In other words, non-Europeans were to be conquered, not dealt with rationally. (That, of course, is not a universally applicable or even complete discussion of the origins of racism). When he arrived in the Americas, rather than deal with the people he met as though they represented another power to be respected, he attempted to enslave the people and put them to work for the colony of which the Spanish government had promised to make him governor. Certainly not singularly responsible, he did, however, help establish patterns of race and class relations that persist today. Unfortunately, most American history stops with his arrival and begins again when the Pilgrims land at Plymouth Rock, thereby ignoring more than 100 years of important history. During that century, Europeans began to play a stronger role in the world trade in goods and people, expanded further into the Americas, and conquered most of central and South America.

The relations that developed in America from Argentina to French Canada (and indeed throughout the world) since that time, had a level of complexity that, as its taught now, most history cannot even begin to approximate. Giving students a taste of that complexity is important, because it gives insight into the world in which they now live. It does not require simply adding more points of view to history. It requires dealing honestly and forthrightly with the facts that are now known (and not the "truths", whatever those might be). Dealing with those facts may be difficult both in their complexity and their tendency to shatter the myths about ourselves that we hold onto most strongly. Dealing with them may even require adding more perspectives to the history that is taught, but all we have to fear from that is gaining the slightest bit of empathy. (Oh no!) Until people understand things like the fact that Blacks in the United States contributed more than just slave labor and were more than passive actors, that there have always been major class distinctions and tensions in America, and that women have made major contributions to the country both in the home and out — until people begin to understand the complexities of history — they will not understand themselves, their world, or each other. Things will stay the same, and I have to tell you, things aren't great. Education is not a panacea, but it can help.

Well, that's one down. And since I did just mention women (oh no, here we go again) I guess that's what I'll take up next. I realize that you have probably heard what I have to say in letters and from everyone who has an opinion on the subject (which seems to be just about everyone), but what the hell. To begin with, I must agree with what you wrote in #179 to the question of whether men and women are equal: men and women are simply different, putting the question itself beyond a simple equal/unequal dichotomy. Much of my thinking about men and women has been shaped by my reading of Nietzsche. He understood, way back in the late nineteenth century, that men had created an image of women which defined them both; women use that image to protect themselves and get what they want, but in doing so, become complicit in their own oppression. However, men did create the image and love women precisely because of their ability to perpetuate the illusion. The larger issue for Nietzsche and for life in general is how much of the illusion is reality; how much of reality is, in fact, illusion; and how necessary is it both to recognize the illusion for what it is and to hold onto it because it is what makes life liveable. In attempting to destroy the illusions about themselves, men and women may well make themselves ugly to one another, destroying the basis for relationships. Which is not to say

that it is not possible to create something different or "better;" it is merely an attempt to be honest with ourselves about what we are doing, which, as Nietzsche says, is the real beginning of anything he might accept as "morality."

All that, however, is just my long-winded and philosophical answer to the rather silly question concerning abstract social constructions of sex: "Don't you think men and women are equal?" In some ways, I go to war with myself in answer to the more practical and immediate question being asked: "Don't you think that all political and social opportunities should be open to both men and women on an equal basis?" My answer is "of course", and I infer from what you have written (especially about women and political office, which I will get to later) that your answer is, perhaps, a qualified "no." To me, disqualifying someone from a job, from voting, from a political office, or anything else because of their sex is just somehow ridiculous because it deals with people as a class rather than as individuals. There are times in the law and in society when that may be appropriate, but in such important practical issues as who gets a job necessary to survival or who gets power, sex discrimination just does not seem justified.

And unless I completely misread the Kevillist/Cirinist story thus far, it is very much an allegory of the different feminist approaches to empowering (has that become a dirty word yet?) women; it also clearly deals with the failure of the two approaches to enter into any sort of meaningful dialogue. The assumption which underlies those approaches, however, is that women do not have power, and the implication you seem to insert in the text is that of course they do. Astoria, through the Eye in the Pyramid, attempts to show women that they have power as long as nothing can be done without them in an office, even if their positions within an organization do not, by name, imply power. Cirin attempts to show women, through the New Matriarchy, that, as the people who give birth and do most of the child rearing, women have power socially that should be mirrored politically. And the women in the story show repeatedly that, within interpersonal relationships, women have a great deal of power. All of that, however, does not convince me that women should not have recognized positions of authority and real power within private industry and politics; even with small gains in those areas, women are still subject to physical, psychological, and economic abuse in their homes, in their jobs, and in the political arena. Just having women in power will certainly not solve all the problems, especially if, like Cirin, they simply recreate the oppression of patriarchy, but it is a first step.

Having experienced it myself seemingly innumerable times, I do recognize that women have power within interpersonal relationships. However, it frequently gets outweighed by men's final resort to physical violence. Recent surveys have shown that women are almost equally involved in initiating and continuing the cycle of domestic violence, and for anecdotal evidence, one need look no further than Lorena Bobbit (about whom surprisingly little has appeared in these pages). But having read a fair number of court cases dealing with domestic violence, I must say that even when they become violent, women are still at a disadvantage. When women attempt to file a complaint, the police are unwilling to make arrests and the district attorneys are unwilling to prosecute. Even when the authorities do become involved, they usually attempt some form of mediation which does not separate the fighting pair; the result is serious injury, usually to women and, if present, children. Perhaps the courts are not the best place to resolve such problems; then again, perhaps they are. But as long as women are not a part of the political system, and it is not responsive to their needs, they will continue to be hurt in ways different than men when relationships go bad, regardless of the power they may have within that relationship.

The situation is quite similar in the workplace. As you and Astoria point out, as long as the information and paperwork passes through their hands, women within an office do have power. But that is different from having a position of power and being recognized and respected as the boss. Even those women who do the same work and thus, presumably, have the same power as their male counterparts get paid less. And all of that disregards the sexual harassment to which women are still subject on the job. They are doubly trapped by that harassment. If they complain immediately, they are told that they must act like one of the guys to be treated like one of the guys. If they take it for as long as possible and then complain when they can no longer bear it (in other words, they "take it like a man"), they are told it could not have been that bad if it took them that long to come forward. Such a double standard is particularly obnoxious if one does believe that men and women are different. Such a belief does not necessarily imply that women cannot do the same jobs as men; however, it could be seen to imply that, in the workplace, men should respect women differently than they respect men (but without patronizing the former), and that women should respect men differently than they respect women (but without having to prostrate themselves before the former). Anyway, the point is that women are still relatively disempowered on the job.

Which, I guess, brings me to issue of women and politics and Astor . . . er Hillary Clinton. In #171 you wrote that women and politics don't mix because they will always put family before the job. You cite as evidence Hillary Clinton's decision to spend two weeks at the bedside of her dying father rather than stay in Washington to work with the health care reform task force. Besides the obviously hasty generalization you made in fallaciously attributing to all women her characteristics, I would object to the conclusion you formed about Mrs. Clinton herself, and point out a seeming contradiction in two of your statements. First, I think it's time to recognize that she is not the president; if she were those who are unhappy with the administration's policies would probably be more unhappy. And if she were president, what she did might have been wrong because of the many tasks she would have faced and because of the impression it might have given to other world leaders. Admittedly, she was the head of an important task force doing an important job, and she left at a fairly crucial time. But people are always complaining that politicians always do what will be perceived correctly rather that actually doing what is correct. The objection is perhaps not universally applicable, since perceptions are important in politics, but the sentiment is not wrong. Hillary Clinton made a decision that the right thing to do

was to go and be with her father during his last few days; she wanted to spend as much time with him as possible. I wish a few more politicians would start doing what is right and care a little less about how what they do looks. My second point is about another comment you made (I cannot find the issue now) about quantity and quality time. The latter, you said, is an invention of Kevillists (among whom you listed Mrs. Clinton) who put their jobs before their families. On the issue of going to see her father, you then said that Hillary Clinton was putting her family before her career, proving that women and politics don't mix. Well, which is it? Can she only be a good politician as long as she sticks to her Kevillist ways and ignores her family? Or will she, as a woman, always end up putting her family first, jeopardizing her ability to be a good politician? It seems to me that you contradicted yourself and placed women in a no-win situation. Whatever the answer, I maintain she just did what she honestly thought was best, and I would like to see a few more politicians do the same

Well now that all that is out of the way, I guess I can finally do something rarely seen in the pages of the letter column: comment on the plot. After reading #179 and Astoria's assertion that Cerebus is a hermaphrodite, I began to wonder about aardvark reproduction (about which I could find almost nothing in my school's library). Although Astoria has not, in the past, been the most reliable source of honest information in the story, I took her assertion at face value but had one question. Having read just about every issue, I cannot remember seeing Cerebus menstruate or go into heat or ovulate or do whatever female aardvarks do as a prelude to reproduction. I know, right now Bear is thinking that that's whattayacallit "gross," but it's a legitimate question. I mean, Astoria may think Cerebus has "all the right plumbing," however that won't help much if the drain is clogged. Anyway, just wondering.

I guess I'm done now. I just want to add that I think you're doing just about the best comic being published, which means, as far as I'm concerned, you're doing one of the best pieces of work in contemporary literature. To me, a good comic is good literature, period. Your characters are well developed, your humor and parody are superb, your subjects are both timely and important, and the way you discuss your topics, whether it be comics, politics, the church, or men and women, is both thoughtful and insightful. You do good work, Mr. Sim. One might even add that it's important, too. Thank you for doing something so enjoyable; I truly respect what you have created. Well, like I said at the beginning, I just wanted to introduce myself and add my thoughts to those being expressed in Aardvark Comment. Best wishes.

Peace,

Sky Woodruff
3267 Prospect St. NW
Washington, DC
USA 20007

P.S. do you ever get bothered by how many post-scripts people add to their letters?

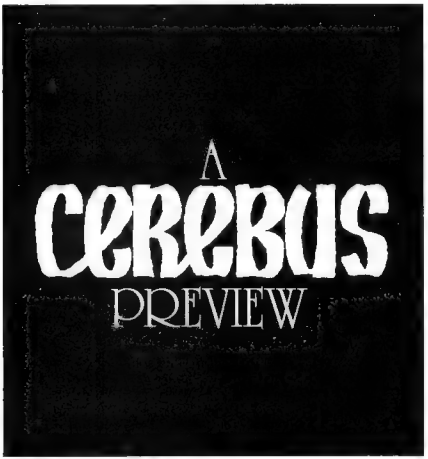
P.P.S. I know I do.

P.P.P.S. Oh, yeah, if this ever see print . . . HEY BLAISE!

P.P.P.P.S. Okay, I'm really done now.

1995–1996
CEREBUS WORLD TOUR
CANADA • UNITED STATES
SCOTLAND • IRELAND
FRANCE • ENGLAND
GERMANY • AUSTRALIA
AND MORE

NEXT ISSUE: the VERY VICKY PREVIEW



I had barely gotten adjusted to the raging fire that was starting to follow Jeff and *Bone* around in late 1992/early 1993, when something else started to smoulder and spark out in the darkness. That, of course, was Terry Moore's *Strangers in Paradise,* a mini-series which appeared from out of nowhere. In the space of two weeks, I got a copy of the first issue and an enthusiastic phone call and/or letter from Brian Hibbs, Diana Schutz and three *Cerebus* fans, along the lines of 'you have to check this out. This guy is GOOD.' They were right, of course. The Frank Frazetta/early Wrightson/Dave Stevens/Sam Kieth style has never been a favourite of mine — I keep wanting to go in with a number four brush and turn all their work into Wrightson's 'Black Cat' job that he did for Warren. Katchoo and Francine are definitely from the 'women with attitude' school of comic book characters. So right there, in terms of my personal taste, Terry Moore had two strikes against him. I say that only as preamble, because (having read the completed series and the first instalment of the sequel in photocopy form), Terry took the next pitch (a change-up, down and away) and hit a towering shot to straight-away centerfield (six rows into the upper deck) in Dave Sim Stadium. As I turned over the last of the photo-copies, I could see Terry trotting around the bases with that kind of you-gotta-be-born-with-it natural humility and grace that tells you a rookie hitter is Going Places. Having just met him in Dallas at this year's *Fantasy Fair* I can tell you that both the creator and his work are the 'real thing'. So I get to run this Preview, here, y'see, and everyone can labour for a little while under the misbegotten illusion that I 'discovered' Terry Moore and *Strangers in Paradise.*

Which is about as difficult and praiseworthy a trick as a baseball scout saying Look over there. Jose Canseco.

Do yourself a favour and send Terry some money if you can't find *Strangers in Paradise* at your local store. Doesn't matter how much — you'll thank me for it in years to come. Terry Moore, ABSTRACT STUDIOS, P.O. Box 271487, Houston, Texas, 77277 1487.

Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Terry Moore.

It's all Freddie's fault.

Really, I can explain. See, I told him I loved him (and we all know what a mistake that can be!) and he couldn't handle it, so he broke up with me! Well, after all I'd done for him...I just lost it, okay? And then Katchoo, that's my best friend, she...oh, wait, I didn't introduce myself did I? Sorry. Let me start over.

Hi. My name is Francine. That's me up there, the one on the right. Katchoo's on the left. She doesn't really glare like that all the time, but the photographer was this really good looking guy and Katchoo's been glaring at men like that ever since I started dating Freddie, the guy I was just telling you about? I don't know, it's a long story. You can read about it in this comic book called Strangers In Paradise. Anyway, let me tell you sort of what's goin' on, 'cause it's really good.

Like I said, it's all Freddie's fault. We were having a rough time, fighting all the time and everything, and Katchoo wasn't helping matters any. She was always picking on him, giving him a hard time. I think she was kind of jealous, y'know? Anyway, I read in Cosmopolitan that one way to really get your boyfriend's attention was to pay him a visit at his office wearing a long coat, and not much else! Can you imagine? I've never done anything like that in my life! But I was desperate, so I just sucked it up and did it. But when I got there...

SURPRISE!
IT'S ME!
FRANCINE!!

Well, I was crushed. I'd never been so humiliated in all my life. Then to complicate matters, Katchoo meets this guy name David. He's a poet.

AND ONLY LEGENDS KNOW THAT ONCE THERE WERE GODS IN THE SEA...
GIANTS IN SIZE, WITH LULLABYE EYES, AND DREAMS...
... LIKE YOU AND ME.
BUT WHEN THE LANDS BROKE OUT IN WAR THE OCEANS IN BETWEEN...
WERE RAGING STORMS AND FIERY HOT.... AND FILLED WITH CHILDREN'S SCREAMS.
A FEW SURVIVED TO SEE THE DAY, WHEN SUNLIGHT WAS DARK AMBER...
AND HEARD THE SOUND OF GODS AT SEA, LEAVING US... FOREVER.
:SIGH: ... YOU'RE NOT GOING TO MAKE THIS EASY FOR ME, ARE YOU?

HOW DO YOU MEAN?
LOOK, I'M TIRED AND YOU'RE A MAN, SO LET'S DROP IT, OK?
I'M SORRY, I'M LOST HERE
IT'S NOT GONNA HAPPEN PAL. YOU'RE BARKING UP THE WRONG TREE.
YOU DON'T KNOW ME. YOU BUY ME A CUP OF COFFEE... YOU READ POETRY.
I DON'T KNOW WHAT SOPHMORIC FANTASY YOU'RE CHASING HERE.. BUT IF YOU THINK I'M INTERESTED YOU'RE SADLY MISTAKEN.
YOU WANT I SHOULD SPELL IT OUT FOR YOU? ... I'M ... NOT... INTERESTED ...IN ... MEN! OK?

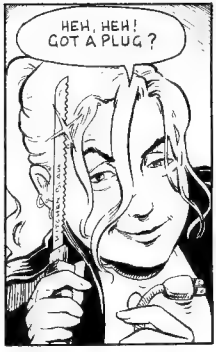
Anyway, so while I was crying my eyes out waiting for Freddie to call and apologize, he was out having the time of his life. What a nice guy, huh?

DING!
EURP!
HARV CONDO
FLOOR
4
STAIRS
WELL? SNIFF ARE YOU COMING OR NOT?
IT'S AWFULLY HOT IN HERE, DON'T YOU THINK?
MAYBE I'LL JUST LIE DOWN A MINUTE...
C'MON!
HAW! GET BACK MR. ANIMAL-MAN WOOF! WOOF!
WHAT'S GOIN' ON OUT HERE? WHO'S MAKING ALL THAT RACKET?!
UH...IT'S JUST ME MRS BIDDYBUTTY, FREDDIE...FROM HB?
HEY!
TEDDY FROMBY?! IT'S 2 AM! WHAT THE SAM HILL YOU DOIN' AT THIS HOUR...WALKIN' A DOG?
UH... PRETTY MUCH, YEAH.
MMPH!

GOODNIGHT MRS BIDDYBUTTY.
SLAM!
HEY! WHAT'S GOIN' ON HERE?!
WATCH THE ROUGH STUFF BUTT-NUT! ALL YA' GOTTA DO'S ASK!
AWW, SHUT UP AND GET INSIDE BEFORE SOMEBODY SEES YOU, OK?
GOO' IDEA LE'S GO 'NSIDE.
BETTER YET, LE'S DO IT RIGH' HERE IN THE HALL! WHADDYA' SAY EDDIE?
THE NAME'S FREDDIE.
WHATEVER! WHAT THE HELL! LET'S ROCK AND ROLL! WAHOOOO!
DOHT!
WILL YOU SHUT UP?!! YOU WANNA WAKE THE WHOLE BUILDING?!
MMPH 'N MMOL!
C'MON TEDDY, LOOSEN UP! YOU GOTTA' LIVE DANGEROUSLY!
48
TELL YOU WHAT, I WON'T USE A CONDOM, HOW'S THAT? NOW GET IN THERE!
AAGH!

But, and this is where it gets really weird, Katchoo sees how upset I am (like I totaled my car and got a black eye and everything) and she goes after Freddie!...'cause she's my best friend and all.

She won't tell me exactly what happened, but I think she scared him pretty good!

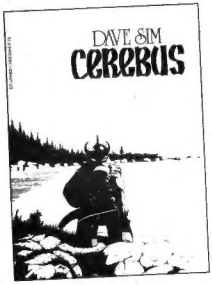


GRAB HIM!!
HELP!
AARGH!
CRASH!
SLAM!
HUMPH!
KATCHOO LISTEN!! I'LL GIVE YOU MONEY! MY PORSCHE!! ANYTHING!!
I ONLY WANT ONE THING FROM YOU FREDDIE FEMURS.
OH GOD!!
SCLICK!
RRRRRRRRRRRR
BUT DON'T WORRY... I'LL HAND IT BACK TO YOU IN A SECOND!

Oh gosh, I'm out of time! I have to go and I haven't finished telling you what happened. I mean, whatever Katchoo did to Freddie, it made him really mad 'cause the next day he and about a hundred cops show up on our doorstep and...oh rats, I really do have to let you go. Just read the comic, it's all in there, okay? See ya later!

Terry Moore's Strangers In Paradise. If you can't find it, write to:
Abstract Studio, P.O. Box 271487, Houston TX, 77277, USA.

CEREBUS: THE FIRST HALF

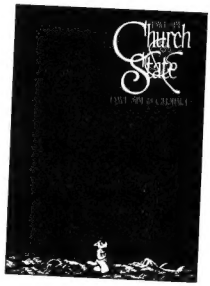


CEREBUS reprints Cerebus 1 to 25
500 pages $25

The Cerebus volume introduces the cast of characters including Elrod the Albino, Red Sophia, Jaka, the Cockroach (later Captain Cockroach with Elrod as Bunky the Albino), Lord Julius, President Weisshaupt and many more.

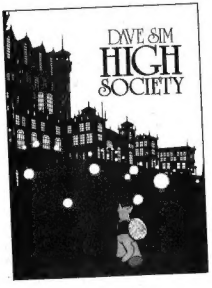
HIGH SOCIETY reprints Cerebus 26 to 50
500 pages $25

Cerebus gets swept up into the world of high power politics in lest and runs for Prime Minister. Introduces Astoria, Filgate, Blakely, the Regency Elf, Dirty Fleagle and his brother Dirty Drew McGrew, Duke Leonardi. The Roach becomes Moon Roach and Sergeant Preston of the Royal Mounted lestan police.



CHURCH & STATE Vol. I & II
reprints Cerebus 51 to 111
1200 pages $30 ea.

One of the longest single stories in the history of comics. Manipulated by President Weisshaupt, Cerebus finds himself married and then finds himself as Pope of the Eastern Church! Introduces Mrs. Henrot-Gutch (Cerebus' mother-in-law), Boobah, Bear, Bishop Powers, Bishop Posey, Mick and Keef and many more. The Roach becomes Wolveroach and the Secret Sacred Wars Roach. Also, in volume II, is the Flaming Carrot cross-over.

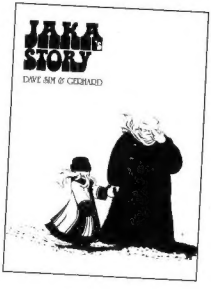


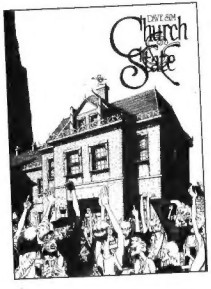
JAKA'S STORY reprints Cerebus 114 to 136
500 pages $25

Cerebus returns to find his life in ruins and ends up as a houseguest of the love of his life, Jaka, and her new husband Rick. Introduces Oscar the poet, Pud, the tavern-owner, and Mrs. Thatcher.

MELMOTH reprints Cerebus 139 to 150
250 pages $17

Cerebus, mistakenly believing that Jaka is dead, takes up residence in Dino's Cafe, clutching Jaka's childhood doll, Missy and his sword. The other half of the story is a faithful retelling of the last days of Oscar Wilde. The Roach becomes normalroach. Introduces Doris, Dino, Janice, Robbie and Reggie. Cameo appearances by Mick and Keef.



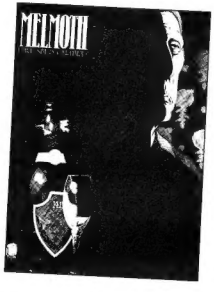


THE SECOND HALF BEGINS IN 1993:

FLIGHT reprinting Cerebus 151 to 162
250 pages ($17)

and

CEREBUS NUMBER ZERO
(reprinting the 'in-between' stories from Cerebus 51, 112/113 and 137-138) ($2.25)

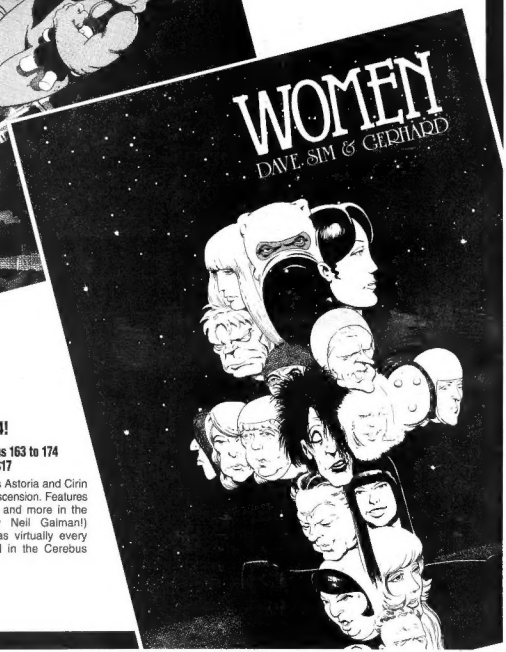


AARDVARK-VANAHEIM INC.
Box 1674, Station C,
Kitchener, Ontario N2G 4R2
519-576-7820
or
519-576-0610

THE SECOND HALF BEGINS HERE

FLIGHT reprints Cerebus 151 to 162
250 pages $17

Cerebus explodes into action in the second half of the 300 issue story-line. Trapped in lest, hunted by the Cirinists, Cerebus battles back. Featuring Punisherroach as well as the unexpected reappearance of many early Cerebus characters, including the first (visual) appearance of Suenteus Po!



NEW IN '94!

WOMEN reprints Cerebus 163 to 174
250 pages $17

The second half continues as Astoria and Cirin contend for the fabled Final Ascension. Features Swoon, Snuff, Sleaze, Sulk and more in the highly-acclaimed (even by Neil Gaiman!) Sandman parody, as well as virtually every female character introduced in the Cerebus storyline to date.

"I have *no* idea how many self-publishers there are out there"

symposiums, industry round-tables, lectures, slide shows. None of that. Just creators, their artwork and their comic books, their t-shirts, buttons, etc. etc. If a retailer or group of retailers would like to pool their resources and fly another self-publisher to the show (most especially Teri Wood or Rick Veitch or Shannon Wheeler as opposed to, say, Jeff Smith) that would be great. If you're asking 'what's in it for me', the answer, I'm afraid, is very little. The benefits would be long-term and I think it would be a very nice thing to do. If you want to help, there are definitely a lot of self-publishers who need all the help they can get. It would be nice if a couple of sponsoring stores for a local event would consider paying transportation for their 'local hero' to go to another event or two to represent their city. Unlikely? Probably — but I did think I would mention it.

On the distribution side, I would like to set up warehouse appearances for attending self-publishers and mini-comics guys to autograph their books and do sketches and hang out with the retailers — an informal sort of thing that could be timed to coincide with a regular ordering meeting. I'll be sending out some kind of press release to some of the guys that I know in the obvious cities (Jeff Smith and Paul Pope in Columbus leap to mind). I'd prefer to avoid any formal set-up — even 'question and answer' period in favour of straightforward sketching and autographing for a few hours on a Thursday or Friday night. If any distributor would like to sponsor a local self-publisher (again, one of the self-publishers who could really use some help), that would be very, very cool. This holds true for CBRI chapters, the DL, all of you guys. We can autograph a bunch of jam prints for you or a bunch of tour books, but, again, I'm not really looking to do any short-term horse-trading. Ger and I expect to lose money on the tour, so I'm not really interested in lining someone else's pockets or doing five store signings in three days to keep you from losing a few dollars.

I have definitely become aware that I have *no* idea how many self-publishers there are out there. The last few conventions and trade shows I've gone to, I have come away with between fifteen and twenty pounds of self-published one-shots, series and mini-comics. If you're out there, you have to let me know if you're interested. If there's a hot-bed of self-publishing in Tennessee I don't know about and you think you have what it takes to get something together with a Few Good Retailers, let me know. If not, we're going to try to accommodate you as close as we can (i.e. Colleen and *A Distant Soil* in the Washington area).

The CEREBUS WORLD TOUR will include the Diamond and Capital Trade Shows, as well as the 2nd Alternative Press Expo in San Jose (which will probably be the Teri and *Wandering Star* stop) and the 2nd Small Press Expo in Bethesda (which will probably be the Colleen and *A Distant Soil* stop). Since I have blatantly stolen the idea for the WORLD TOUR from them, I feel it's the least I can do. Although I have had overtures from several of the major cons to set up a self-publishing/mini-comic area, I remain unconvinced that we won't all get 'lost in the shuffle' — apart from myself, Jeff Smith and a few others. I don't fault the conventions for their exponential growth and 'amusement park' qualities, *but* I don't think starting self-publishers and mini-comics guys are well-served by the natural ghettoization which is created by giant ABA-style booths with banks of TV monitors, dry ice machines, etc. etc. I want the Cerebus tour stops to consist of creators and their work. Period.

So far, these stops are definite: February, 1995: Austin, Texas. Martin Wagner, Shannon Wheeler, Terry Moore.

Other cities and states: SEATTLE: Michael Cohen/*Strange Attractors*, Drew Hayes/*Poison Elves*. SAN JOSE: Teri Wood/*Wandering Star*. BETHESDA: Colleen Doran/*A Distant Soil*. COLUMBUS: Jeff Smith/*Bone*, Paul Pope/*The Ballad of Dr. Richardson*. ARIZONA: James Owen/*Starchild*. MANCHESTER VERMONT: Steve Bissette/*Tyrant*, Rick Veitch/*Rare Bit Fiends*. CHICAGO: Larry Marder/*Beanworld*. PITTSBURGH: Don Simpson/*Bizarre Heroes*.

I (and possibly Gerhard) will also be doing OZCON in Sydney Australia. The mainstream representation (owing to the distance) is so marginal and there are so many small press and self-publishing things happening in Oz, that the con practically qualifies as a small press expo. The purpose of flying all that ungodly distance again is to help kick off Eddie Campbell's adventure in self-publishing. That'll be in 1996 and I know George and Christine Vlastaras, as Down Under Champions of the Small Press will get behind a Dave, Ger and Eddie event of monumental proportions, both through Comics Australia Distribution and King's Comics (uh — right, guys?).

The other 'legs' of the tour — Scotland, England, Ireland, Germany, etc. might be a little more traditional — although I suspect that there's probably enough happening in self-publishing and mini-comics across the Big Pond to get something a little different together.

So, if you're a retailer in one of the above-mentioned cities or nearby and you want to help, those are the folks to contact. I expect (and am looking forward to) each of the events being very different from one another, reflecting the different abilities, interests and 'quirks' of the self-publisher who will be helping them take shape. Anyone who wants to help, just let 'em know.

I mean, you don't want *your* city and *your* local hero (or heroine) to look bad, do you?

No. Of course you don't.

NEXT ISSUE: More even-less-subtle arm-twisting and some details.

Cerebus WORLD TOUR 1995